

THE ANTIMISSION MOVEMENT IN THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH AND WEST

A Thesis

by

BRIAN RUSSELL FRANKLIN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2007

Major Subject: History

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,
Committee Members,

Head of Department,

Charles E. Brooks
Katherine Carté-Engel
C. Jan Swearingen
Walter L. Buenger

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ABSTRACT

The Antimission Movement in the Antebellum South and West. (August 2007)

Brian Russell Franklin, B.A., Dallas Baptist University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Charles E. Brooks

From 1814 to 1845, over 68,000 people organized in opposition to the missions societies which had arisen out of the revivals and reform movements of the Second Great Awakening. Traditionally, the study of these revivals and reform movements has focused on the Northeast. This perspective has largely passed over millions of citizens of the West and South, particularly those groups who opposed northeastern religious practices. Those who chose to join the Antimission Movement, most of whom were Baptists, represent one such group.

A few historians have examined the Antimissionist Movement, but no one has given full attention to the movement as it materialized in the South and West. By examining this movement, its leaders, and their writings, I give the people involved in it their deserved voice, a voice which primarily proclaimed religious beliefs. I also explain how the social, economic, and political beliefs espoused by the people of the Antimission Movement collectively act as a window toward a broader understanding of antebellum western and southern culture in general.

The people who participated in the Antimission Movement did so for expressly religious reasons. While most missions societies espoused Arminian theology by exalting the role of humans in their own salvation, most Antimissionists believed in Calvinist doctrines of salvation, which exalted the sovereign will of God. In addition, Daniel Parker, one of the foremost leaders of the Antimissionists, championed the controversial doctrine of the Two Seeds. This belief

allowed for Antimissionists to neatly divide everyone in the world into two separate, predestined categories – those of the good seed, and those of the bad seed. This theological dichotomy fueled the battle between missions societies and Antimissionists for decades.

Antimissionists perceived every realm of life religiously. Thus, they opposed the labor, market, and monetary practices of missionaries not for economic reasons alone, but because of their religious beliefs regarding economics. Similarly, Antimissionists rejected the societies on political grounds, because they believed the societies espoused unrepugnant principles and unbiblical church government. So although the Antimission Movement revolved around religious controversy, it represented a clash between two entirely different cultures.

To Dr. Michael E. Williams

Hebrews 13:7

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Abraham Lincoln may have spoken these words to an Illinois audience in 1858, but before him, R.B.C. Lowell penned these same words in an 1835 Tennessee periodical entitled *The Baptist*. Lincoln would later use the phrase in reference to the country’s sectional division over the question of slavery, but Lowell had other issues in mind. In 1835, the lack of unity among Baptists in Tennessee was lamentable. Churches and associations of churches throughout the country were dividing at remarkable speeds. In Lowell’s mind, one controversy sparked more discord among Baptists than most any other, and it wasn’t slavery; it was missions. In his article, Lowell wrote about broad religious disputes and offered general advice on how to solve the conflicts over Baptist theology and “the means to be used for its extension.” Only once in his three-page article did he depart from his generalized criticisms and exhortations to single out a specific problem that plagued the Baptist Church in Tennessee. That problem was the doctrine of “*the two seeds*,” and the man famous for promulgating it was one of the premier leaders of the Antimission Movement from 1814-1845, Daniel Parker.¹

A theological controversy, like the one over Parker’s Two Seeds, is the proper place to begin a study of the Antimission Movement. Although the controversy between supporters and opponents of missions societies featured political, economic, social, and

This thesis follows the style of *The Journal of Southern History*.

¹ R.B.C. Powell, ed., *The Baptist*, vol. I, no. 3 (Mar. 1835): 35, 33.

sectional elements, the central point of contention was over religious beliefs. When Parker explained to his readers in June 1831 why Antimissionists should oppose missions societies of the East, he did not refer to economics, politics, or sectional strife. Instead, he focused on doctrine, specifically, the doctrine of the Two Seeds. This doctrine, he explained “will furnish the church with a knowledge...which will enable her to withstand the errors of every false system...[and] will enable the church to account for the many plans and ways which are laid to lead the children of God astray.” Throughout the life of the Antimission Movement, its leaders called the people to doctrinal loyalty first if they hoped to successfully oppose their missionary enemies from the East.²

The Historical Context of the Antimission Movement

The Antimission Movement took place during a period of momentous change in America, a period historians commonly refer to as “The Market Revolution.” During this time of revolution, no facet of society was exempt from change. The economy burgeoned tremendously after the War of 1812. Farming, once based mostly on principles of the independent rural household, quickly became a major commercial enterprise. Railroads, canals, and telegraphs began connecting areas of the country previously isolated from one another, thereby enhancing communication and commerce. These changes altered the everyday lives of many Americans. In the latter years of the First Great Awakening in 1745, the average white man probably farmed some land or

² Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 9 (June 1831): 207-08.

exercised his abilities in a particular craft, all according to his own schedule. By 1845, the latter days of the Second Great Awakening, industries and factories dotted the countryside, employing many of those same average men as wage laborers. And now, they worked according to someone else's schedule. Yet, while many had become less independent economically and socially, they experienced considerable political gains. Thanks to the age of Andrew Jackson, the common man (the common *white* man, that is) witnessed the expansion of voting rights and democratic ideals unheard of under Federalist rule.³

Amidst all of these things, antebellum America overflowed with religion, reform, and benevolent societies. In the late 1790s, mass revival meetings began to occur in western lands such as Kentucky. The greatest of these revivals saw upwards of 20,000 people gather at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801. But the revivals did not stop there. Like wildfire, revivals and revivalists spread throughout the country. By the 1830s, the revival fires, under the leadership of Charles Finney, had reached their apex in a portion of western New York that soon inherited the apt name, "The Burned-Over District." What made Finney so outstanding and successful was that in addition to facilitating thousands of conversions to Christianity at his revivals, he exhorted citizens to take their newfound faith and put it into action. Anyone who wished to work out their salvation could easily do so by joining one of the reform societies which abounded in the East,

³ Some of the books which have examined the effect of the Market Revolution on American society include Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian American, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); and John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

especially in major cities such as New York and Philadelphia. Most of the people involved in these tract, temperance, antislavery, Bible, and missionary societies claimed roots in Protestant Christian beliefs and committed themselves to reforming and improving the country. For an exemplar of such people, one needed to look no further than the thousands of Methodist circuit preachers and Baptist missionaries sent out to minister to the people in the West and South. Many of these men left homes, families, and all they knew in order to bring the Gospel to the western and southern frontiers. The social and spiritual impact these reformers and missionaries made on the country was immeasurable, setting the standard for all future attempts at benevolence and reform in America. Yet, in 1831, in the midst of their outstanding growth and success, Daniel Parker characterized the professed Christians involved in such societies as “a set of wicked rebels against the government of Heaven.”⁴

Claiming that benevolent reformers, particularly missionaries, had no business calling themselves true Christians seems a bold statement for Parker to have made. Nevertheless, he and at least 68,000 others involved in the Antimission Movement from 1814-1845 claimed just that.⁵ While most of the country gloried in the moral direction

⁴ Daniel Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831): 247. Some of the best studies which discuss Charles Finney’s role in the revivals and reform of the “Burned-Over District” are Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950); Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*, 2nd Edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

⁵ William Warren Sweet used what he considered “the best Baptist authority” to calculate a total of 68,068 Antimission Baptists in 1846. See *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830*, with an introduction by Shirley Jackson Case (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 66. Bertram

of the Second Great Awakening, the Antimissionists stood stalwart against it. What makes this movement more than an idiosyncratic episode in United States History is that it provides a much broader portrait of plain folk in the antebellum South and West. Missionary societies called the East home, lived in urban areas, embraced the new market economy and society, and participated feverishly in the active revival and reform culture spawned by the Second Great Awakening. In contrast, those involved in the Antimission Movement lived in the West, worked as farmers, related to the burgeoning market only tangentially, and furiously guarded their local authority and independence. Thus for these men, Byron Lambert claimed, their fight against the missions societies represented not only a religious battle, but “one expression of the American doctrine of freedom.” This expression of freedom reveals several things to us. First, it provides us with an important example of an overlooked facet of American reform during the Second Great Awakening, namely, opposition to it. However, it also provides a window into understanding not only religious conflict, but also the economic, social, and political clashes which abounded during the Age of Jackson.⁶

For the most part, the Antimission Movement was a yeoman phenomenon. In 1860, D.R. Hundley complained that “not one Yankee in ten thousand” understood the prevalence of yeomen farmers or other plain folk in the South. Those outside of the

Wyatt-Brown claimed that this number was significantly underestimated, citing the fact that the numbers were compiled “by promission chroniclers,” in “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 36 (Nov. 1970), 527. Another reason for believing that the number of Antimissionists had been much larger was that by 1845, the movement had been in decline for a decade. At its height, it’s safe to assume that Antimissionists numbered thousands more.

⁶ Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840* (New York: Arno Press, 1980): v.

South thought that only three groups of people lived there – slaves, wealthy plantation owners, and “poor white trash.” Hundley equated this assumption with believing the “moon [was] made of green cheese!” Historians have since labored over trying to define the class of whites in the South who did not own large plantations or great numbers of slaves, yet managed to own and work on their own land. The number of slaves owned, one’s net worth (whether in crops or livestock), the number of acres farmed, the relationship between the farmer and his slaves, and how the farmer managed his property have all been used to define exactly who the plain folk were. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the terms “plain folk” and “yeomen” interchangeably. By using them, I refer to people who owned their own land, worked on their own land (sometimes alongside a few slaves), and lived as independent from the cities and markets as possible. For a living, they most often raised livestock for market, grew enough crops for their family and community, or did some combination of the two. They valued local political networks over widespread national authority. These were the sort of people who engaged in the Antimission Movement.⁷

⁷ D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (New York: Henry B. Price, 1860; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973), 192-93 (page citations refer to the reprint edition). Since the 1940s, an increasing amount of scholars have sought to study and define exactly who the yeomen and plain folk of the West and South were. Some have defined the group very technically by counting the acres, money, and slaves they owned and using these totals to divide one class of whites from another. For examples of this method, see Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Lacy Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Mark Wetherington, *Plain Folk’s Fight: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Piney Woods Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Others have chosen to define plain folk more loosely, often according to the kind of lifestyles they led rather than the amount of property they owned. For example, I think Stephanie McCurry best defines the yeomen as “self-working farmers,” because this is exactly how they distinguished themselves from “the higher class of planters” around them. See *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (Oxford:

With so many potential causes for the movement, the question remains: Why did more than 68,000 people join churches and associations which wanted to eradicate the missions societies of their day? Theology, sectionalism, class resentment, and denominational disputes all played a part in the controversy. Although the study of these issues specifically regarding the Antimission Movement has received little attention, historians have asked similar questions regarding antebellum religion and society in general.

Historiography of the Second Great Awakening

The study of religion and revivals during the Second Great Awakening has received a wealth of attention from historians. Although the Awakening pushed religious issues to the forefront of antebellum life, this period of religious upsurge clearly had wider implications for society as a whole. For example, social changes amongst religious groups contributed both to the growth of revival culture and the opposition to it. As the eighteenth century came to a close, groups of people such as women and African-Americans suddenly began to gain opportunities to participate in public religious exercises, such as prayer and giving spiritual testimonies, opportunities previously denied to them. Much of that opportunity came as a result of the growth of denominations such as the Baptists and Methodists. Denominations such as these upset the balance which had been led by groups such as the Anglicans and Congregationalists,

Oxford UP, 1995), 47-48. See also Frank Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949); and Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992), 34-37.

Samuel Hyde, Jr., has written a very helpful article that traces the historiography of plain folk and yeomen in the antebellum South and West. See "Plain Folk Reconsidered: Historiographical Ambiguity in Search of Definition," *The Journal of Southern History*, 71 (Nov. 2005), 803-830.

many of whom opposed the equalizing nature of the revival culture. These changes in religious leadership were so profound that they upset political and social balances throughout the country as well. Men who had traditionally considered themselves in control of various facets of their lives (family, church, etc.) began watching their power slip away. Often, these men connected their social and political ills directly with the growth of what they saw as excessively-democratic denominations and revivals. By focusing anew on the importance of equality, evangelism, conversion experiences, and layperson participation, these burgeoning evangelical denominations not only upset the religious balance; they upset the balance of society itself.⁸

Historians have gone beyond descriptions of broad social unrest to more nuanced studies of the place of religion in society during the Second Great Awakening. Since virtually everyone in the country experienced the effects of the Awakening, no facet of life remained untouched. Political rights and participation expanded, partially due to the expanding rights gained in the realm of religion and revivals. Opportunities for women to lead public lives grew enormously as many began to participate in and even lead

⁸ Works which have explored general social change and unrest as causes for religious revival include, Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District*; William McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959) and *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Donald Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis," *American Quarterly*, 21 (Spring 1969), 23-43. Rhys Isaac claimed that various forms of social and political unrest in the late-18th and early-19th centuries resulted primarily because of religious issues, or at the very least, people's perceptions of religious issues. See Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). Finally, other historians have focused on the shifting of authority within the home as a primary cause and effect of the religious revivals and reform of the Second Great Awakening. See Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Mary Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; and Carol Shammas, "Anglo-American Household Government in Comparative Perspective," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 52 (Jan. 1995), 104-44.

reform societies, many of which sprung directly from revivals. As a result, both women and men began to develop new understandings of their roles inside and outside of the home. Once again, much of this social and familial changed happened as a direct result of the religious wildfire spreading across the country.⁹

Ironically, the historians who have produced this scholarship on religion and reform in the early Republic have tended to neglect the central issue at hand: theology.¹⁰ Most people who participated in revivals, benevolent societies, reform organizations, or other religious groups did so primarily because of their personal religious beliefs. Yet if one were to peruse the pages of most scholarly work dealing with these subjects, one would find theology only in small doses. Although we cannot expect every historian to have the same breadth of theological understanding as pastors and seminary students, a solid grasp of the beliefs of those whom one studies is essential to the historian's craft. Comparatively few have put this into practice.¹¹

⁹ One of the best studies of religion in the Antebellum period, particularly regarding its relationship to expanding political rights is Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). More detail regarding "the cradle of the middle class" and family-life during the Awakening may be found in Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*. For discussions of revival and reform in regard to questions of gender relations, see Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); and Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹⁰ I use the word "theology" to refer to more than scholarly or systematic treatises. Rather, I refer to the core beliefs which people held, based upon their reading of the Bible and their understanding of their religious leaders. Theology acted as the foundation not only for many people's beliefs about church and salvation, but also for social issues, economics, and politics. I will occasionally use terms such as "religion" or "worldview" to refer to the same idea.

¹¹ For example, some of the most influential analyses of antebellum religion over the last twenty-five years hardly mention theology at all. See Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*. 2nd Edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); and Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*. Each of these works, although very perceptive regarding issues

Even historians who have specifically given attention to the role of religion during antebellum revivals and awakenings have often placed theology in a sort of subcategory, as if its only merit came as a tool used for other ends. When religion is considered in this manner, otherwise genuine expressions of belief become nothing more than masks to cover people's "true" motives. For example, Paul Johnson claims in *A Shopkeeper's Millennium* that the growth of evangelicalism during the Second Great Awakening was not fundamentally a genuine religious movement, but a "middle class solution to problems of class, legitimacy, and order generated in the early stages of manufacturing. Revivals...functioned as powerful social controls." I do not dispute that even the most dedicated religious leaders struggled with keeping their personal ambitions and the public good in mind; they all did. However, treating their expressed, deepest beliefs as mere facades or tools gives them far too little credit.¹²

With that said, it is also clear that the study of theology in the early republic has not been totally ignored. Historians such as Mark Noll and E. Brooks Holifield have

such as changes in family dynamics or social hierarchies, fails to spend any prolonged amount of time discussing the beliefs which underlay these changes.

¹² Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 138. Although Johnson offers qualifying statements meant to soften the idea of desires for wealth and social control commanding religious leaders' beliefs, he clearly implies this. Again, on page 139, Johnson wrote: "Here we enter dangerous territory. For if we infer the causes of revivals from their results, we must conclude that entrepreneurs consciously fabricated a religion that suited their economic and social needs." In the footnote following, he writes about the difficulty of defining "the secular origins of religion."

Charles Sellers came to similar conclusions in his *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian American, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991). For example, on page 216, he wrote: "Christian businessmen...were pioneers of...humanitarian reforms partly because their market perspective and heightened sense of potency made them the first to feel responsible for a broader range of evil wrought or good left undone...While the Moderate Light satisfied the most pressing psychic needs of Christian entrepreneurs, it also served their class need for cultural hegemony over the democratic antinomianism of the masses." Most of the book, particularly Chapter 7, echoes the belief that religious leaders were primarily interested in something other than religion. Another work which complements these methods and beliefs is Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias*. For an excellent critique of this "social control" hypothesis, see Lois Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *The Journal of American History*, 60 (June 1973) 23-41.

placed theology at the center of their works, claiming that people's beliefs and the way in which they developed them had profound impacts on society. Indeed, without understanding the beliefs of many of the reformers, it would be impossible to understand the reforms they advocated. For the most part, however, the study of theology and its applicability to history has been left to denominational and seminarian historians. Those within religious circles tend to produce highly nuanced understandings of the beliefs of historical figures. However, where such studies have often fallen short has been in their assessments of how theology played a critical role amidst the entire historical narrative. While studying the beliefs of those in the past is important, it is even more important to understand how these beliefs actually contributed to historical change.¹³

Historiography of Religion in the Antebellum South and West

Study of religion in the antebellum West and South (where the Antimission Movement was strongest) has been productive, but has tended to lag behind that of the

¹³ Mark Noll's research provides one of the best examples of paying particular attention to the roll of theology in American history. Not only does he see theology as central toward understanding major events such as the War for Independence and the Civil War, but as central to understanding early America in general. See *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). See also E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). For insightful studies of theology and its connection to antebellum reform, see Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Keith Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987); and Leo Hirrel, *Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

Examples of studies which have been helpful to me in studying theology in the early Republic, yet have also failed to critically assess the importance of those beliefs toward historical change are B.H. Carroll, *The Genesis of American Anti-Missionism* (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1902); Glenn Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality: A Study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin, and Horace Bushnell* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1991); and Joe Early, Jr., "Daniel Parker: A Common Man for the Common People," *American Baptist Quarterly*, 23 (2004), 50-64.

Northeast. The primary reason for this is that the urban centers of the Northeast not only boasted the majority of the population and wealth in America, but they also hosted the majority of mass revivals and reform societies of the Second Great Awakening. As a result, historians have been left with a wealth of sermons, tracts, personal testimonies, newspapers, and other written sources by which they can interpret the events that transpired and the people who lived in the Northeast. On the frontier, however, small communities and small churches dotted the landscape. Even though the backcountry South and West also hosted major revivals, the people involved produced far fewer written documents than their urban counterparts. As a result, historians have far fewer resources available for analysis. Nonetheless, historians have managed the challenge and produced research that has shed light not only on religion in the early Republic, but specifically on the religion of common yeomen in the South and West.¹⁴

Many historians have examined yeomen on the frontier, yet few have placed their professed religious beliefs at the forefront of study.¹⁵ Books written and edited in the mid-twentieth century by historians such as T. Scott Miyakawa, Walter Posey, and

¹⁴ From this point on, I will often use “frontier,” “backcountry,” “West,” or “South” to refer to the population which lived outside of the North and East. My reason for doing so is that the Antimission Movement spanned throughout this entire area. Daniel Parker, the preeminent leader of the movement, lived in Georgia, Virginia, Kentucky, Illinois, and Texas. Those involved in supporting the movement were just as widespread. I do not mean to collapse such broad areas with rich diversity into one amalgam. My intent in using these terms interchangeably is to distinguish between the typical antimissionist southern or western citizen (an independent yeomen farmer) and the typical northeastern citizen (living in an urban area and tied to the market economy).

¹⁵ Some of the best studies of plain folk in the antebellum South and West include Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*; Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., ed. *Plain Folk of the South Revisited* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1992); Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949); Mark Wetherington, *Plain Folk's Fight*; and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

William Warren Sweet were pioneers in the study of religion on the frontier. Sweet, in particular, produced several priceless volumes which combined both historical essays and primary documents, all meant to shed light on the mysteries of the frontier church. Since then, study of southern and western religion has grown, culminating in the most important work in recent years, Christine Heyrman's *Southern Cross*. Heyrman's work seeks to explain how an elite South, once averse to evangelicalism, transformed into the center of evangelicalism: the Bible Belt. Yet when the study is complete, one is left less with a study of theology and religion and more with a story of a power struggle. In *Southern Cross*, the South's conversion to evangelicalism had little to do with the possibility of genuine shifts in belief. Instead, it tells the story of those in the lower strata of society – blacks, poor, women, and youth – gaining *power*, not religion.¹⁶

Historiography of the Antimission Movement

The study of religion in the early Republic, both in the East and West, provides the foundation for an understanding of the Antimission Movement. Because Antimissionists lived primarily on the frontier, had plainfolk farmers as their leaders, and opposed the immensely popular benevolent societies of the day, their lives have

¹⁶ T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Walter Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1776-1845* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957). William Warren Sweet produced four volumes of essays and primary documents between the years 1931 and 1946 that presented information on Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians on the frontier.

Regarding Heyrman's work, for example, she writes that "the process of repentance...fostered a profound sense of individual importance. For some southerners – those who happened to be black in a society ruled by whites, poor in a society that bowed to wealth, female in a society dominated by males, young in a society that honored age – being taken seriously was always a novelty, and often an irresistible seduction." The idea that repentance first signified a genuine change of heart and behavior is hardly even considered. See Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 41.

received far less attention than they deserve. Still, scholarship on the Antimission Movement has appeared sporadically over the last fifty years, and intense disagreement has arisen regarding its causes and implications. Many historians have discussed the Movement only in passing as part of the larger story of religion among yeomen in the antebellum South or West.¹⁷ Only two scholars have attempted to examine the Antimission Movement as a subject worthy of independent study: Byron Cecil Lambert and Bertram Wyatt-Brown. Originally written as a dissertation in 1957 and later published in 1980, Lambert's work examines the sources and leaders of the Antimission Movement in light of the theme of "religious individualism." According to Lambert, both eastern and western leaders participated in antimissionism as an act of individualism and freedom. These themes clearly ran through the writings and beliefs of Antimissionists, and Lambert is right to identify them as important. However, as much as he favors individualistic doctrines as the motivations for antimissionism, so he seems to denigrate the role of genuine doctrinal disputes. On one hand, he seems to imply that Antimissionists' religion deserves respect and careful study, such as when he states that "the religious convictions of anti-Missionists were their primary concern." Yet throughout the work, his language betrays the opposite. He characterizes Daniel

¹⁷ Walter Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 68-70; T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, 88-90, 145-58; Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 97, 177-79; John Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South: 1815 to the Present* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 55-85; Dan Wimberly, "Daniel Parker: Pioneer Preacher and Political Leader," Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1995. This dissertation was later published as *Frontier Religion: Elder Daniel Parker, His Religious and Political Life* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002). Even amongst these cursory discussions of the Movement, disagreements abound. Those like Wimberly suggest that racial conflict, sectional resentment, and class struggle represent the main motivations for the Movement while historians such as Crowley and Hatch argue that doctrine and local loyalties remained the central point of contention.

Parker's as full of "misdirected argument and naïve contradictions," a man who "infected" the places he lived in with his influence.¹⁸ In the end, although Lambert's work is profoundly useful in tracing the sources of Antimissionism throughout the antebellum United States, it fails to critically examine the theology as promised.

The most well-known piece of scholarship regarding the Antimission Movement is Bertram Wyatt-Brown's 1970 article, "The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South." Wyatt-Brown's accomplishment in 1970 was his perception of religion's connections with social, economic, political, and sectional issues. These issues found their way into the midst of the doctrinal debates between the missions societies and their opponents throughout the struggle. Like most other historians of religion, and like all historians who have studied the Antimission Movement, Wyatt-Brown concluded that something other than religion was the central issue. In reality, he claimed, the Movement was "decidedly sectional." Granted, a historian would be a fool to deny the sectional nature of the Antimission Movement. As missions societies progressively sought to move out of the East, westerners became more and more apprehensive. As northern missionaries invaded southern lands with their Yankee ways, southerners became more and more attached to their local communities and opposed to those from outside. Yet defining the entire movement as "decidedly sectional" oversimplifies the conflict. Lambert aptly pointed out that most westerners, even Antimissionists, were recent immigrants to the west; most of these would not have automatically harbored ill

¹⁸ Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), xi, 392. See also pp. 268, 274-75, 377, and 413 for less-than-sympathetic depictions of Antimissionist theology.

will toward eastern visitors' endeavors. In addition, several antissionist leaders, including Theophilus Gates and Elias Smith, actually lived in the East. Fletcher Green, a highly respected historian of Southern life and culture, contended that despite popular perceptions, Yankees were often cordially accepted in the South before the Civil War as co-contributors to society. Sectional lines developed in the dispute, but they were not the central point of contention. Despite formally acknowledging that Antissionists considered doctrine as more than "convenient screens to hide social and economic misgivings," Wyatt-Brown concludes that it was these very social and economic misgivings which composed the heart of the Antissionist quarrel with the missions societies.¹⁹

My Analysis of the Antission Movement

Considering all of this information, I hope to contribute a more sympathetic understanding of the Antission Movement than has previously been provided. First of all, I seek to give full credence to the Antissionists' professed religious beliefs as their primary foundation for opposing the missions organizations. Unless evidence to the contrary presents itself, it is simply not the historian's prerogative to assume that these professed religious beliefs, regardless of how nonsensical or ridiculous they may seem to

¹⁹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Antission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture," *The Journal of Southern History*, 36 (Nov. 1970), 514, 502-03; Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, 250; Fletcher Green, *The Role of the Yankee in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), ix, 4. During his journeys in the backcountry, Frederick Law Olmsted remarked that yeomen were generally "more cheerful, more amiable, more sociable, and more liberal" than he expected, despite the fact that he was a visitor from New York. See *A Journey in the Back Country*, Introduction by Clement Eaton (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860. Reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1970); Wyatt-Brown, "The Antission Movement," 511.

us, functioned as masks to cover other motives. My analysis readily accepts the fact that questions of economics, behavior, politics, and sectionalism played a part in antissionist opposition, but I will argue that they understood even these “secular” issues as part of a worldview based explicitly on their religious beliefs. Knowing that doctrinal issues were at the heart of the entire conflict actually lends itself to a deeper understanding of the antissionist position. Rather than viewing their opposition to missions societies as mere quibbling over secondary issues, the reader can truly appreciate each argument as part of a much larger, deeply-religious worldview.

By examining all of these issues not from the eastern reformers’ points of view, but from the perspective of the western and southern farmers, I hope to provide a broader understanding of religion and reform during the time of the Second Great Awakening. Revivals and religious fervor may have reached their apex in the Northeast, but without an understanding of religion elsewhere in the country, one’s perspective remains limited. In the end, this thesis will contribute toward a better understanding of religion in the early Republic, especially the lives of the tens of thousands of frontier yeomen who joined the Antission Movement. However, it will also provide a new window through which historians may better understand the growing religious and sectional rifts in the country that would later culminate in civil war.

I have drawn most of my conclusions regarding the Antission Movement and the beliefs of its participants from the writings of its leaders. More than any other, I have focused on the writings of Daniel Parker, recognized by many throughout the nation as the primary antissionist leader. Although other leaders such as John Taylor,

Alexander Campbell, and Elias Smith played important parts in the conflict, I have chosen to view the battle through the eyes of Parker. He wrote profusely, maintained a wide audience, communicated often with both opponents and supporters, and personally spread his messages across a vast stretch of the South and West. Yet through it all, he remained a simple yeomen farmer, gaining no wealth and little in the way of positive renown outside of antissionist circles. Because of these things, I believe that he is an excellent representative of the Movement.

My examination will not be limited to any particular region or state, but instead will span most of the country. I do this precisely because the Baptist Antimission Movement spanned the nation, gaining most of its supporters in the West and South. Limiting this study to a smaller region of study would do an injustice to the breadth of the opposition. Parker himself reflected the widespread nature of the Antimission Movement, living at some point in his life in the states of Virginia, Georgia, Kentucky, Illinois, and Texas.²⁰

As with most historical studies, it is difficult to artificially determine the beginning and end dates of this study. Although seeds of the Antimission Movement can be traced back as far as eighteenth-century England, the best starting date for the American Antimission Movement can be comfortably set on May 18, 1814. It was on this day that the first meeting of a national Baptist missions organization took place – the

²⁰ William Warren Sweet estimates that by 1846, the following states boasted at least 1,000 Antimission Baptists: Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. As mentioned previously, these numbers represent *conservative estimates*. Clearly, the opposition to missions spanned the entire southern and western regions of the U.S. See *Religion on the American Frontier, The Baptists*, 66.

General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions. This organization's primary concern was clear: sending missionaries throughout America and abroad. Conflict ensued between supporters and opponents of the missionary plan for the next few decades, culminating in 1845 with the separation of the Southern Baptist Convention from the national body of Baptists. Although slavery represented the ultimate point of contention between northern and southern Christians by this time, it was the longstanding controversy over missions and other benevolent societies that had helped create the environment of discord necessary for the split.

The majority of my primary sources were religious in nature. Both the leaders of and participants in the Antimission Movement wrote about subjects as diverse as predestination and the labor theory of value. The leaders produced the majority of the major works, including books, periodicals, and essays. In the case of Daniel Parker, I had an impressive body of literature to study, including several theological articles, a public speech, and a periodical which he independently produced on a monthly basis for two years. However, other participants commonly wrote letters and editorials which either asked questions of their leaders or expressed their opinions on various matters. Many of these were either printed or directly responded to by the leaders of the Movement. As supplemental primary source material, I gave attention to church minutes, letters of correspondence, and accounts of travels through the various regions of the South and West. Whether these documents contained mundane details of meetings or colorful descriptions of frontier life, they all aided me in understanding what

the life of a typical Antimissionist would have been like. Finally, scholarly secondary material in the form of dissertations, articles, and books was indispensable in my study.

This thesis will tell the story of the Antimission Movement and examine the ideals which motivated its participants. Chapter 1 tells the story of the movement from 1814 (the year in which the first Baptist home missionaries were sent out) until the height of the Antimission Movement in 1831. Chapter 2 focuses on the theology of the Antimission Movement, specifically on the peculiar doctrines which informed their opposition to Arminianism and the missions societies. In Chapter 3, the discussion turns to the Antimissionists' beliefs regarding labor, money, and the market. These frontiersmen associated the missions societies not only with bad theology, but also with bad stewardship of some of the most precious resources known to yeomen – land, labor, and the local economy. Chapter 4 examines the beliefs of Antimissionists regarding various levels of government and authority, both secular and religious. Finally, the conclusion recounts the decline of the Antimission Movement from the height of Daniel Parker's ministry in 1832 until the split of the Baptist church in 1845.

CHAPTER II

THE RISE OF THE ANTIMISSION MOVEMENT

In 1815, after almost ten years of constant battles, Daniel Parker rejoiced that he could finally trade in his sword for a plowshare. “The war now being ended between the Methodists and myself,” he reminisced, “I concluded that I should now live in peace.” For years, Parker had worn himself out working his own farm and providing for his family, while still finding time to travel extensively for preaching engagements. Because he refused any sort of payment for his pastoral services and was “too proud to beg,” he constantly worried that his principles brought too much suffering upon his family. However, now that he felt confident about his defeat of the Arminian, infant-baptizing Methodists in his area, he believed he could happily settle down. “But alas!” Parker wailed, “the worst had not yet come.” Although he considered his theological battles with the Methodists significant, they would pale in comparison to the war he would fight for the following three decades against the missions system.²¹

Earlier In 1815, world-renowned Baptist missionary Luther Rice began traveling throughout the West and South, drumming up support for both home and foreign missions. His travels brought him directly through north-central Tennessee, Parker’s neighborhood, and to an association meeting of several local Baptist churches. Although Parker had lived up to this point “in perfect peace with the Baptists,” his meeting with Rice changed everything. After witnessing Rice’s unabashed pleas for the support of

²¹ Daniel Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 270-77.

missions, Parker took a stand against him. It seemed that not only was Rice promoting an unbiblical form of missions, but that he was part of a larger plot by eastern “man-made, devil-sent, place-hunting gentry” to undermine the religious and civil liberties of men like himself. From that day on, Parker claimed, “the greatest enemy I ever had in human shape [was] the mission spirit or principle.” For Parker, the war would not end until he either killed the missions error or died trying; he died in 1844.²²

The First Triennial Convention of 1814

On May 18, 1814, the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America met to discuss, among other things, the prospect of home missions to the West. Few could have foreseen the fierce opposition they would incur or the devastation their decisions would wreak upon the Baptist denomination. For the next thirty years, churches split, associations dissolved, and preachers and missionaries throughout the nation chose sides against one another. Eventually, the missions crisis contributed to a major schism in the national Baptist church as delegates from eight states and the District of Columbia announced their decision to leave and form the Southern Baptist Convention in May 1845. By then, the number of Antimissionists on record was more than 68,000. Every one of them had contributed to denominational divisions which would plague states for decades to come.

In 1811, such ominous predictions for the future of the Baptist church in America would have been hard to make. B.H. Carroll claims that not only was the number of

²² *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 277, 286. On p. 278, Parker admitted that when he moved to Illinois to combat McCoy, he believed that the missions system was so entrenched that the war would not end “but with my natural existence.”

Antimissionists low at this time, but that not even one antimissionist church existed in the entire nation. Considering the origins and nature of the Antimission Movement, this is not surprising. As of 1811, no comprehensive national Baptist missions society had yet formed nor set its eye on the frontier. The population in many areas where antimissionist sentiment would later grow, such as Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri, was still relatively small. Other than the original thirteen states, along with Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio, no other territory had acquired enough population or organization to achieve statehood since 1803. All in all, these relatively low frontier populations had not yet experienced threats to their geographical or social space from eastern people or ideas. Thus, they had no concrete reason to oppose whatever religious societies happened to be budding in the East at the moment.²³

Indifference to religious societies, missions or otherwise, did not mean that frontier folk lacked religion. Even a cursory examination of western and southern travel narratives during the early republic makes this abundantly clear. In Frederick Law Olmsted's travels throughout the frontier backcountry, he constantly encountered people who expressed religious or theological beliefs. Although he tended to view many such people with disdain, he nevertheless recorded conversations about the Bible, revivalist camp meetings, infant baptism, prayer, immersion, salvation, and denominational preferences. The famed David Crockett told many stories about hunting bears, but he also openly wrote about the sovereignty of God upon the death of his wife. Similar

²³ B.H. Carroll, *The Genesis of American Anti-Missionism* (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1902), 185.

stories permeate the travels of Peter Cartwright, Henry Schoolcraft, and even those who were adamantly against most religious institutions, such as Anne Royall. Not only was religion present on the frontier, but support for religious activity, including missions, remained high. In fact, when Luther Rice began raising support and funds during his frontier travels from 1814-1817, the greatest monetary contributions came not from northeastern states, but from the backcountry states of Tennessee and Kentucky.²⁴

The occasion for Rice's journeys throughout the frontier was his appointment as the first Baptist missionary to the West by the aforementioned General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America. On May 18, 1814, thirty-three Baptist delegates from eleven states convened in Philadelphia for this meeting, known in abbreviated form as the first Baptist Triennial Convention. The original appeal for such a national gathering had come from Luther Rice and Adoniram Judson, both of whom had participated in foreign missions to India and Burma since

²⁴ For example, see Frederick Law Olmsted records a long religious discussion which he had with two men known as "The Judge" and "The Colonel," in *A Journey in the Back Country*, introduction by Clement Eaton (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860. Reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 129-135; David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*, introduction by Paul Andrew Hutton (Philadelphia: E.L. Carey and A. Hart, 1834; Reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 125-26. For other examples see Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, introduction by Charles L. Wallis (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956); Anne Newport Royall, *Letters from Alabama, 1817-1822*, introduction and notes by Lucille Griffith (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965); and Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas* (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1821).

William Warren Sweet, ed. *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830*, introduction by Shirley Jackson Case (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 61. Carroll interpreted the lack of frontier opposition to missions societies before 1814 as indifference to the idea of missions in general, in *The Genesis*, 21. Considering the religious nature of many of those on the frontier, not to mention the evidence for churches supporting missions ventures in the early 1810s, it is clear that Carroll's conclusion is not adequate for explaining the mindset of future Antimissionists. Walter Posey claims that Rice collected the most money in Massachusetts, which was closely followed by collections in Kentucky and Tennessee, in *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1776-1845* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 65. Either way, the fact that frontier areas supported missions endeavors with fervor remains.

1812. While Judson remained in Burma, Rice returned to the States with his eye on establishing missions in the West. This national gathering of Baptists marked a significant shift in Baptist polity. Unlike Presbyterians, Methodists, or Catholics, Baptists celebrated their belief that no church authority existed above that of a local congregation. As a result, Baptist churches never exercised authority over one another and rarely brought distant congregations together en masse. Although individual congregations and local associations of congregations had jointly sent missionaries to the West since 1755, the Triennial Convention marked the first time such a union took place on a national level. As one of their first acts, the delegates to the 1814 Triennial Convention broke this tradition by appointing Luther Rice as a missionary to the West.²⁵

Not all Baptists supported this venture. John Leland, a lifelong Baptist and a staunch Jeffersonian (and later Jacksonian) spoke at the convention and expressed disdain for its decisions and its very existence. Like a good Jeffersonian, he opposed all things Federalist. So when it came to the religious controversy over missions, one way in which he expressed his disapproval was with political terms. He believed that Baptists were abandoning Republican principles of local authority and adopting Federalist principles of organization: “the people nowadays...form societies, and they must have a president and two or three vice-presidents, to be like their neighbors around them.” Leland had spent much of his life fighting for religious freedom and the separation of church and state. The last thing he wanted to see was his beloved Baptists

²⁵ Carroll, *The Genesis*, 51; T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 145; Posey, *The Baptist Church*, 65.

aping the ways of Federalist politicians by nationalizing their resources and services. The Convention provided more fuel for detractors when it announced in its constitution that only societies who contributed at least \$100 per year to the Convention would be permitted to send delegates for decisions-making at the triennial meetings. These national meetings, the focus on missions only to the West, the monetary requirements for membership, and the lack of consideration for the majority of Baptist churches in the nation all led Leland to believe that Baptists were slowly losing their local and congregational liberty. Leland's influence on the beginnings of the Antimission Movement had only begun. Over the next few years, he would be in written contact with one of the greatest leaders of the Antimissionists on the frontier: Daniel Parker.²⁶

Daniel Parker and the Beginnings of Frontier Antimissionism

From the beginning of his life on April 6, 1781, Daniel Parker steadily developed the beliefs and characteristics that would make him into a successful religious leader on the frontier. Parker was born in Culpepper County, Virginia, and moved with his family to Georgia when he was a small child. He remembered his childhood as one characterized by a life of farming and "as an Indian hunter, in the back woods." In 1798, around the time of his seventeenth birthday, Parker experienced a significant change in his life; he finally began to seriously consider religion. Religious influences had always

²⁶ From *Writings of John Leland*, ed., Greene, quoted in Lambert, *The Rise*, 126; Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, 15-16, 145; Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 126-27. Lambert considers Leland "the first and by far the greatest of the anti-Missionist Baptists (116)." Defining measures of greatness is difficult overall. However, in considering the movement primarily as a western and southern phenomenon, the direct influence of Daniel Parker and John Taylor had a much greater impact on the movement than that of Leland in the northeast.

played a central role in Parker's life. He remembered his mother as "a God-fearing woman" who often taught he and his siblings about "the great danger of sin, our need of a Saviour, and that we should fear and worship God." However, not until he turned seventeen and heard the preaching of a local minister, Elder Moses Sanders, did he ever consider a devout commitment to religion for himself.²⁷

Over the course of several years, Parker wrestled with questions of salvation, wondering if God would ever grant him repentance or whether he was doomed to eternal damnation. Parker's long struggle on the road to conversion was typical in his day. Although immediate mass conversions later gained popularity under the mass revival meetings of men such as Charles Finney, such a view had not always held sway in America. Puritan and other Protestant traditions believed in conversion, but they often stressed the need for an individual to wrestle with his sin and repentance, just as Parker did. Such a struggle would help assure a person that their confession was genuine. After months of inner turmoil, Parker's spiritual struggles with uncertainty ended on the third Sunday of January 1802. On this day, he was baptized into Nail's Creek Church in Franklin County, Georgia, and promptly began engaging in ministry. In March of the same year, Parker married Martha "Patsy" Dixon and began considering a change of scenery. Along with several families from their community, the Parkers decided to move to north-central Tennessee in June of 1803. They purchased "a little poor spot of land" on which they could raise crops, and for the next three years, Parker preached and

²⁷ All of the preceding biographical information comes from two documents written by Parker: *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831):259-270; and *The Second Dose of Doctrine on the Two Seeds, Dealt out in Broken Doses Designed to Purge the Armenian Stuff and Dross out of the Church of Christ and Hearts and Heads of Saints* (Vincennes: Elihu Stout, 1826).

ministered throughout Dixon, Sumner, and other surrounding counties. His ministry reached its highest point thus far when in May 1806, the Baptist church at Turnbull's Creek officially ordained him.²⁸

Immediately, Parker commenced his "war" against Methodists in the region. Because he believed that many of their primary teachings on subjects such as salvation, baptism, and church government were unscriptural, he could not stand by idly. For Parker, there were only three choices: "quit preaching, or acknowledge that I believed and preached a doctrine that I was unable to defend, or otherwise draw the sword and fight." Although he considered himself "an unlearned backwoodsman" who had little formal education or religious training, ceding victory to errant religious leaders was out of the question. In this instance, as well as in every other religious confrontation for the rest of his life, Parker drew the sword and fought.²⁹

It was not inevitable that Daniel Parker would rise to the position of leadership which he attained in the Antimission Movement. At the same time, one can easily understand how the circumstances of his life – geographic, mental, social, and religious – led him directly toward this position. Parker was able to gain the respect of thousands of yeomen on the frontier, primarily because he was one of them. He came from a family with modest property, but far from wealthy. He was a recent migrant to western lands, but had been raised on a small farm, in the backwoods of Virginia and Georgia. Like most people on the frontier, he lacked formal education, yet still knew how to read

²⁸ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 267-74.

²⁹ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. I., no. 1 (Oct. 1829): 8; vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 271-72.

and write considerably well. Most of his knowledge of things grammatical came from reading the Bible, the one piece of literature which many frontier families owned, regardless of whether they enjoyed reading or not. Parker considered the protection of his family and local community as paramount to all other loyalties. He showcased this in his religious experiences by preaching zealously against enemies and reacting to encroachments on any part of his life. It was this Daniel Parker who after hearing Luther Rice's requests to support the budding national Baptist missions system, vowed to go to war against it. As a common yeoman, Parker was average. As a religious leader, he became exceptional.³⁰

If Rice had been the only representative of northern and eastern plans for the missions system to the West, the Antimission Movement may never have gotten off the ground. Fortunately for the Antimissionists, he was not alone. The General Missionary Convention of 1814 had only begun to carry out its plans. The Second Triennial Convention of May 1817 solidified the experimental missions plans of the 1814 convention by appointing several more missionaries to the West and South. The convention first sent James Ronaldson to minister in Louisiana, and later in Alabama. In support of his work and other missions opportunities in the area, the Mississippi Society for Baptist Missions formed in June of the same year. The Convention then focused its most concerted effort on missions to the West, particularly to the area which

³⁰ For supremely informative discussions of Southern yeomen and their values, see Elliott J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *The American Historical Review*, 90 (Feb. 1985), 18-43; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., ed., *Plain Folk of the South Revisited* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

encompassed the newly-formed state of Indiana as well as the Illinois and Missouri territories. They began supporting two men in these areas who would prove to be some of the most powerful adversaries of the Antimission Movement: Isaac McCoy and John Mason Peck.³¹

John Mason Peck, although a frontier preacher and missionary for much of his life, was not a frontier man by birth. Indeed, his background represented a perfect foil to that of Parker's. Peck was born in 1789 in Connecticut and baptized into a Congregational church as an infant. During his early twenties, after switching to the Baptist faith, he moved to New York, where he stayed until his appointment as a missionary to the West in 1817. In contrast to Parker, who received no formal education whatsoever, Peck studied under the tutelage of William Staughton, the future president of Columbian College (which later became George Washington University). Armed with his northeastern lifestyle and education, Peck took an exploratory missionary expedition down the Ohio Valley for the Baptist Convention in 1817. Along with his fellow appointee James Welch, a native of Kentucky, the two covered hundreds of miles in an effort to raise funds, similar to Rice's experience a few years before. In addition to their focus on missions to both whites and Indians, Peck and Welch pioneered Baptist support for education on the frontier. When they arrived in St. Louis in 1817, they immediately founded a school. Within months, they had begun a second school in

³¹ Walter B. Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1776-1845* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 66-67, 82.

nearby St. Charles. In 1822, Peck spearheaded the formation of an academy in Illinois that would later become Shurtleff College, one of the first colleges in the state.³²

Parker and many Antimissionists remained averse to educational institutions throughout their lives, but what really fueled their anger toward the missions system was not education, but the condescending attitudes the missionaries maintained toward them. Peck settled in St. Louis in 1817 and stayed there until 1822. During this time, he often compromised his leadership (in the eyes of Antimissionists) by belittling the very people to whom he was supposed to minister. In St. Louis, Peck asserted, “One-half, at least, of the Anglo-American population were infidels of a low and indecent grade, and utterly worthless for any useful purposes of society.” When many responded negatively to his efforts to establish educational institutions in the area, he sarcastically remarked, “Some of them were as much afraid of a dictionary as they were of a missionary.” Peck’s derisive comments could not have accounted for all antimissionist opposition. However, they represented the sort of attitude which Antimissionists cited as reason for opposing missions societies. Rufus Babcock, who was Peck’s friend and editor of his papers after his death, wrote that many people over whom Peck and Welch had formerly held sway eventually “went over to the anti-mission party.” Peck spent the rest of his

³² Posey, *Baptist Church*, 66; Paul M. Harrison, introduction to *Forty Years of Pioneer Life: Memoir of John Mason Peck, D.D. Edited from His Journals and Correspondence* by Rufus Babcock (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), xiii-xiv; Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 260; Posey, *The Baptist Church*, 101.

life throughout the West and the Mississippi Valley, and he would encounter opposition to his missionary commission everywhere he went.³³

Later in his life, Daniel Parker would consider Peck as his primary adversary in the missions war, but early on, he developed his strategies against missions in direct response to Isaac McCoy. Since 1808, McCoy had pastured the Maria Creek Baptist Church near Vincennes, Indiana. In 1817, the second Triennial Convention asked McCoy to join their work by setting up the convention's first missions to the Indians along the Wabash River. Within the year, he began the new missions and had received encouraging responses. More so than Peck in the beginning, McCoy experienced success with both whites and Indians on the frontier. Among his parishoners, support for missions actually increased in the later 1810s. Whether this success came because McCoy spoke with more subtlety or simply because he had better geographic luck, it is hard to say. Either way, Parker and the Antimissionists did not approve.³⁴

After his encounter with Luther Rice in 1815, Parker began visiting the Wabash Valley sporadically. He aimed to know his enemy, which more or less meant gaining as much information as possible about the missionaries' plans and tactics. He practiced this long-distance reconnaissance for months, growing increasingly worried about the growth of the missions error in Illinois and Indiana. When McCoy's influence reached heights that Parker felt he could not counter from his home in north-central Tennessee, he decided to move his family to Illinois. The Parkers were not alone in their

³³ Posey, *The Baptist Church*, 152; John Mason Peck, *Forty Years*, ed. Babcock, 85-87, 157; Babcock, ed. *Forty Years*, 171.

³⁴ Lambert, *Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, 260; Posey, *The Baptist Church*, 81.

emigration. After 1812, thousands upon thousands of Americans moved from the older states of Pennsylvania, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee into regions encompassed by Alabama, Missouri, Indiana, and Illinois. Contemporaries deemed this mass exodus “The Great Migration.” John Mason Peck observed from his St. Louis post that it seemed the entire states of “Kentucky and Tennessee were breaking up and moving to the ‘Far West.’” So in December 1817, the fact that Parker and his family left their Tennessee home of fourteen years for Clarke County, Illinois, would not have attracted any special attention; thousands of others did the same. What made Parker’s move significant was that he did not move for more land or a business venture. He moved with the explicit purpose of combating McCoy and the missions system.³⁵

Antimissionists on the Offensive

In 1818, Parker made his first move against the missions system. When all the churches of the Wabash Association met that year, Parker’s church sent him as a representative. Without hesitation, he questioned the presence and usefulness of the missions society: “Is there any use for the United Society for the Spread of the Gospel? If so, wherein does its usefulness consist?” Parker followed his questions up with a proposal that the Wabash Association withdraw its membership with the society. The Association agreed and voted to withdraw immediately. The word of their opposition

³⁵ John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 49-51; Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 276-78; William Warren Sweet, ed. *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830*, intro. by Shirley Jackson Case (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 68-69; Daniel Parker, “A Public Address to the Baptist Society and Friends of Religion in General on the Principle and Practice of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions or the United States of America,” (Vincennes: Stout & Osborn, 1820), 4.

spread quickly. Within months, churches like the Wood River Church and Lamotte Church were raising support against missions throughout Illinois and Indiana. The antimissionist fire had been lit in the West, and Parker had played a significant role in igniting it.³⁶

From the beginning, Parker never fought alone against the Baptist missions societies. While Parker led the fight in the upper Midwest, it was John Taylor who led the way in the upper South. Taylor described the national missions plan in the same sort of dangerous and conspiratorial terms as Parker: “The deadly evil I have in view, is under the epithets or appellations of *Missionary Boards, Conventions, Societies*, and Theological Schools, all bearing the *appearance* of great, though affected sanctity.” These sentiments come from a book which Taylor wrote in 1819 and had published in 1820, entitled *Thoughts on Missions*. This piece quickly became one of the most well-known antimissionist writings in America. It helped vault both Taylor and the frontier Antimission Movement out of local obscurity and into a place of national prominence.³⁷

John Taylor was born on October 27, 1752, in Prince William County, Virginia. Like many Southerners and Westerners, his family was of Scottish ancestry and his family’s primary source of income was the family farm. Not only did Taylor grow up with a religious family, but the evidence of vibrant religion swirled all around him. Of all the colonies and territories which achieved statehood in the eighteenth century, Virginia experienced some of the most pronounced religious upheaval. As Anglicanism

³⁶ Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, 261.

³⁷ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, (Franklin County, KY, 1820), 4. I added emphasis to “appearance,” because Taylor clearly believed that the professed benevolent plans of missions societies acted as façades for more sinister motives.

declined in power and evangelical denominations such as the Baptists progressively gained power throughout the 1700s, no Virginian citizen could have avoided religious knowledge or controversy entirely. Taylor's life exemplified this societal shift when upon his conversion in 1772, he left Anglicanism and joined the Baptist church. Ten years later, Taylor married and moved to Kentucky, where he would live until his death in 1835. Like most people on the frontier, Taylor's primary livelihood came from farming. By the end of his life, he owned substantial amounts of property, including thousands of acres of land and thirty-two slaves. Despite his substantial wealth, Taylor represents an excellent example of "the farmer-preachers" of the antebellum South and West who religiously defended their communities as part of the Antimission Movement.³⁸

Hailing from a similar geographic area, with a similar family background, it is no surprise that the manner in which Taylor got involved in the Antimission Movement mirrored that of Parker. On August 13, 1815, Taylor heard Luther Rice preach for the first time at the Elkhorn Association meeting in Lexington, Kentucky. Rice's stop in

³⁸ John Taylor, *Baptists on the American Frontier: A History of Ten Baptist Churches of Which the Author Has Been Alternately a Member*, 3rd ed. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995), 86; Chester Raymond Young, introduction to *Baptists on the American Frontier*, 5-7, 13-21, 75, 83. For the best discussion of the religious and societal upheaval of Virginia in the eighteenth century, see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

Young, *Baptists on the American Frontier*, 75; William Warren Sweet, quoted in Young, *Baptists*, 83. Although some scholars draw the dividing line between yeoman and planters according to a particularly number of slaves a person owned, a more fluid definition is necessary for individual cases such as Taylor's. Although Taylor did acquire much land and more than twenty slaves by the end of his life, he continued to work his own land along with his sons for much of his life. Much of his early wealth, in fact, came not from his own work, but from an inheritance he received upon the death of his uncle, Joseph Taylor. See *A History of Ten Baptist Churches*, 155-56. Finally, Taylor always identified himself as a yeoman rather than associating with the planter class in his everyday life. For these reasons, I consider Taylor's experience, albeit different from many yeomen, to be a clear example of a typical frontier response to the missions system.

Lexington was part of the same missionary tour on which he encountered Parker for the first time. The Elkhorn Association as a whole rejoiced in Rice's message and immediately collected \$147.75 in hats passed around the room, all for the Triennial Convention. Taylor would have no part in it. Like Parker, Taylor responded derisively to Rice's pleas, believing them to be out of character with Scripture and the principles of the Baptist Church. As a result, he immediately began exploring ways to combat the missions plan. In 1818, just after Parker had moved his family to Illinois to combat the missions plan, Taylor began visiting Missouri. Although he preached on his two trips there, he intended to investigate the work of the two most influential missionaries in the area: John Mason Peck and James Welch. After seeing the successful progress the missionaries were experiencing, Taylor knew that it would take more than sporadic sermons to win the battle.³⁹

On October 27, 1819, his sixty-seventh birthday, Taylor began writing his antimissionist attack, *Thoughts on Missions*. Within a few years, his book was not only published, but it had gained national prominence, reaching the meetings of church associations in Kentucky, the hands of the caustic national-traveler Anne Royall, and the bookstores of Theophilus Gates in Philadelphia.⁴⁰ Taylor lashed out at missionaries and

³⁹ Young, *Baptists*, 51-53.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Thoughts*, 3; Young, *Baptist*, 56; Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, 335-36, 221. Lambert spends an entire chapter of his study on the Antimissionists examining Theophilus Gates and considers him to be the preeminent leader of the Antimission as it developed nationally (ps. 203-26). I disagree with his conclusions, not because Gates was unimportant to the movement, but because it seems that much of his work remained in the East, separated from the mass of the confrontations which were taking place on the frontier. Lambert concedes that although Gates's periodical *The Reformer* arose at the same time as the frontier Antimission Movement and encouraged antimissionist publications, Gates was never able to organize opposition as a leader. The primary reason for this, Lambert correctly asserts, was that the majority of the war occurred "in the Wilderness," not in

their sending societies for their abuses of Christianity and their treatment of western peoples. The missionaries rarely seemed to respect local customs and authority, he complained. The way which they made and used money had no respectability on the frontier nor precedent in Scripture. He also resented the rumors often spread by missionaries which led northeasterners to believe that no religion had existed on the frontier before the missionaries came. Taylor's complaints resonated clearly with thousands of people, especially those in the backcountry, because it used backcountry beliefs and worldviews to combat the invading ideas and practices of missionaries.⁴¹

One must keep in mind that these harsh, pointed, and inflated criticisms of the missionaries' economic practices arose from the context of a very real historical crisis: the Panic of 1819. While trans-Appalachian land sales had totaled a little over one-half million in 1813, they skyrocketed to nearly 4 million by 1818. This boom in land sales accompanied burgeoning western and southern populations, which resulted in the creation of five new states between the years 1816-1820 (Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois, Alabama, and Missouri). For a short time, farmers throughout the frontier enjoyed the promise of new lands and prosperous lives. Along with expansion and opportunity, however, came bankers and credit. In 1819, with inflation rising, the number of banks contracting, world agriculture prices collapsing, businesses failing, and unmanageable credit forcing individuals to declare bankruptcy all over the country, the Panic hit. Not surprisingly, the economic devastation was most pronounced in the South and West.

Philadelphia (p. 169). Because this thesis examines the Antimission Movement primarily as a southern and western movement, Gates's contributions simply do not figure into the story in a substantial way.

⁴¹ Influence is difficult to measure, but both Lambert and Carroll considered Taylor's *Thoughts on Missions* to be one of the most influential antimissionist documents produced. See Carroll, *Genesis*, 86; and Lambert, *The Rise*, 335.

Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton lamented that the entire West had been “mortgaged to [the] money power,” which needed only “one gulp, one swallow, and all is gone!” The Antimissionists of the West experienced these troubles firsthand. Although their religious principles predated events like the Panic of 1819, Antimissionists used such crises as springboards for their beliefs to gain prominence. Considering the economic devastation the Panic had left in the West, antimissionist leaders like Taylor would have had no problem enlisting religious support against the “money power” of the Triennial Convention.⁴²

The Battle Rages

By 1820, the war over missions had passed its opening stages and was shaping up to be a long contest. After the Wabash Association of Illinois withdrew its membership from the national Baptist society in 1818, they endured harsh criticism and questioning from missionist leaders for the next couple years. One of their harshest critics came from the Maria Creek Church (another church within the Wabash Association) and its pastor Isaac McCoy. Supporters of the missions system accused Antimissionists of all sorts of things: being opposed to the spread of the gospel, rejecting the translation of the scriptures into Indian languages, and behaving tyrannically toward their own members. What may have angered the Antimissionists who endured these criticisms most was the claim that in their opposition to the missions societies, the Wabash Association simply did not really “understand what she was doing.” In other

⁴² Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian American, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 131-32, 137-39, quotation from 138.

words, people like Isaac McCoy refused to accept the idea that intelligent, Bible-believing Baptists could have any good reason to oppose that which he so avidly supported. After Parker listened to these false accusations for the first couple years he lived in Illinois, he decided that he must speak out. In 1820, he prepared and published “A Public Address to the Baptist Society,” a sixty-three page document which outlined all the reasons why Antimissionists opposed the Baptist missions plan and why they knew exactly what they were doing. This piece put Parker’s name on the lips of Antimissionists throughout the South and West. Along with Taylor’s *Thoughts on Missions* and the ever-growing discontent with missions on the frontier, “A Public Address” helped spread the Antimissionist cause like wildfire.⁴³

By 1820, Antimissionism had exploded in the western backcountry. At the time the Triennial Convention first implemented its plan in 1814, very few churches openly expressed opposition to missions. Even after about five years, Baptists in states such as Tennessee overwhelmingly supported the idea of missions. However, by 1820, one Tennessean observed that “the current of prejudice had gradually swollen” so much against missions that “no one dared to resist it.” Antimissionist sentiment all over the South and West followed suit. In Illinois, Wood River Church announced in October that they were “not willing for any of her members to have any thing to do with the board of Western missions.” The elders allowed a man to contribute the money he had already promised to the Convention, but warned him not to give a penny more. So few supported missionaries in Missouri that due to lack of funding, the Triennial Convention

⁴³ Parker, *A Public Address*, 3, 11

was forced to cancel its partnership with John Mason Peck. After Ohio churches gave \$547.09 to the Triennial Convention in 1820, they proceeded to give a grand total of only \$15 over the next ten years. Some Tennessee associations eventually maintained such strict antimissionist beliefs that they refused to admit anyone into membership who belonged to a reform society of almost any kind, for fear that they would associate with missions societies.⁴⁴

After years of observing and hearing about one another, Daniel Parker and John Mason Peck met for the first time at the 1822 meeting of the Wabash Association. The members of the association met in order to discuss any issue brought to the table by any delegate. Instead, they ended up listening to a five-hour debate between Parker and Peck. Peck later described his first impression of Parker in condescending terms: Parker was “uncouth in manners, slovenly in dress, diminutive in person, unprepossessing in appearance, with shriveled features and a small piercing eye.” However unkempt Parker may have seemed, it must not have affected his debating skills. By all accounts, the debate, most of which pertained to the missions question, ended in a draw. Even Peck had to acknowledge the passionate Antimissionist’s skill, albeit with reservation: “Repeatedly we have heard him when his mind seemed to rise above his own powers, and he would discourse for a few minutes on the divine attributes, or some doctrinal subject, with such brilliancy of thought and correctness of language as would astonish men of education and talents.” If Parker was able to “rise above” his limited powers and

⁴⁴ Quoted in Posey, *The Baptist Church*, 72; Minutes of the Wood River Church, in Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, 270; T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 146; Carroll, *The Genesis*, 3-4.

achieve the success of someone like Peck, who actually had “education and talents,” he must have been an intriguing speaker and leader. Even though Peck derided Parker in word, he had to acknowledge that Parker was succeeding in deed.⁴⁵

While Parker and the Antimissionists gathered forces in the 1820s, Peck and the missionists regrouped and sought new ways to inject the gospel into the supposedly pagan West. After Peck and Welch lost the monetary support of the Triennial Convention, they sought employment from numerous other reform societies. Welch immediately returned to the East to join the staff of the newly formed Sunday School Union. Peck broadened his reform-society affiliations much more widely. During his final year with the Baptist Triennial Convention, Peck had been in contact with the Massachusetts Missionary Society as well. When the Baptist Convention withdrew his support, Peck immediately joined the Massachusetts society and moved in April 1822 to Rock Spring, Illinois (eighteen miles from St. Louis). By 1827, Peck worked not only as a missionary, but as an agent for the American Bible Union, General Sunday School Union, American Colonization Society, and the American Tract Society.⁴⁶

Peck could not have made it much easier for Parker and the Antimissionists to believe a conspiracy was afoot. With Peck simultaneously representing so many eastern interests, backcountry yeomen were sure he had more than benevolence on his mind. Peck fueled the conspiracy theory even further when in December 1822, he preached to the Illinois House of Representatives on behalf of the Bible Union. After his sermon, he

⁴⁵ Lambert, *The Rise*, 271, Lawrence Edwards, *The Baptists of Tennessee, with Particular Attention to the Primitive Baptists of East Tennessee*, printed Master of Arts Thesis (University of Tennessee, May, 1940) 33, quoted in Lambert, *The Rise*, 255; .

⁴⁶ Babcock, *Memoir of John Mason Peck*, xiv, 172; Lambert, *The Rise*, 270.

took up a collection – a collection for explicitly religious purposes, from among the governing body of the state. If missionaries could infiltrate the houses of government and solicit money for their plans, Antimissionists feared that it would only be a matter of time before they somehow lost their religious and civil liberties. Of course, Peck's attempt at taking up a collection did not please everyone. One senator objected in principle but refrained from audibly voicing his opinion while the House was in session. The senator probably knew that the missionist cause had lost so much ground in the area that his vehement disagreement was not necessary at the time. That senator, recently elected in November 1822, was none other than Daniel Parker.⁴⁷

In 1823, a third leader burst onto the frontier antimissionist scene with this monthly periodical *The Christian Baptist*: Alexander Campbell. Born in 1788 in western Pennsylvania, Campbell's life also fit the farmer-preacher model which Parker and Taylor exemplified. He too grew up amidst religious discussion and controversy, his father Thomas having been a staunch supporter of antisectarianism and anticlericalism in both the United States and Scotland. From his birth until 1812, Campbell belonged to the Presbyterian Church. However, like Taylor, he changed his denominational loyalties and joined the Baptist church in 1813, where he would stay until 1830. Whether he was confessing Presbyterianism in 1810 or claiming Baptist loyalties in 1830, Campbell was committed to the sufficiency of the local church, something both Taylor and Parker championed all their lives.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Lambert, *The Rise*, 271.

⁴⁸ Lambert, *The Rise*, 289; Posey, *The Baptist Church*, 69; Alexander Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, vol. I, no. 41, 205-07.

Although some historians consider Campbell the most influential Antimissionist of the time, such a statement needs qualification.⁴⁹ His writings probably reached an audience larger than that of Parker or Taylor, but Campbell's unique beliefs set him apart from the main arguments which most Antimissionists used to combat missionists. For example, while Campbell jumped from denomination to denomination in his life, Parker and Taylor, along with most Antimissionists on the frontier, remained strict Baptists. While Parker and Taylor opposed the missions system on the basis of doctrinal disputes within the Christian Church, Campbell opposed missions because he believed that the entire American church was still in need of true conversion. His foundational criticism rested with the church as a whole, not the missions system. Before it could attempt good works like missions, Campbell proclaimed, the church needed another reformation. In addition, Campbell rejected the Calvinist doctrines of salvation which Parker and Taylor considered central to their dispute with the Arminian missionaries. Campbell, in fact, ended up rejecting so much of what conservative frontier Antimissionists considered important (denominational integrity, Calvinism, unregenerative baptism) that he could hardly be considered their leader. Instead, he ended up attracting "liberal" religious followers who rather than opposing missions societies on the basis of unshakeable principles, simply disliked encroachments on their freedom.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Both Lambert and Carroll believe Campbell was the most influential Antimissionist. See Lambert, *The Rise*, 315, and Carroll, *The Genesis*, 8.

⁵⁰ Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, vol. II, no. 8 (Mar. 1825): 70; Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, 150.

To be sure, frontier antissionism fed from more than strict, conservative theology; it also grew in response to the continued efforts of easterners to invade their lives. Welch found employment with the American Sunday School Union, which formed in 1824 with plans to promote education and build schools throughout the land. This was followed by the American Tract Society in 1825, the American Home Missionary Society (an interdenominational effort at missions) in 1826, and the controversial General Union for Promoting the Observance of the Christian Sabbath in 1828. All of these societies, although with professedly benevolent aims, nevertheless sought to change the traditional lives and customs of people throughout the country. All of these new efforts evidenced the success of the revivals, reform movements, and benevolent societies of the 1820s. At the same time, however, they stimulated an equal and opposite reaction: Antissionist opposition.⁵¹

The Heights of Antissionist Opposition

Both Parker and Taylor continued to gain repute amongst their followers after their initial antissionist publications in 1820. In 1824, Parker published a pamphlet entitled “Reflections on Church Discipline.” He did this while in the middle of holding an elected seat in the Third and Fourth Assemblies of the Illinois Senate, from 1822-1826. In 1826, Parker published his most controversial theological treatise yet, his *Views on the Two Seeds: Taken from Genesis*. Within the next year, he published *A Supplement or Explanation of My Views on the Two Seeds* and *The Second Dose of*

⁵¹ Lambert, *The Rise*, 270.

Doctrine on the Two Seeds, both of which were attempts to clarify the complex doctrine he promulgated in the first treatise. More than all his other writings, these made the case for a complete rejection of all things related to the missions societies. By making the missions societies and their followers in the family of the “bad seed” and placing the Antimissionists in the family of the “good seed,” he converted a one-issue controversy about missions societies into an epic battle between good and evil. Although many disagreed with Parker’s peculiar doctrines, even amongst the antimissionist camp, his continual sale of written material and his two-term service in the state senate clearly show that he maintained the admiration of those around him.⁵²

John Taylor enjoyed similar success in the 1820s in the antimissionist cause. In 1823, he published his first edition of *A History of Ten Baptist Churches*, a recollection of his experience with ten churches in Kentucky. This volume met with such unexpected success that an updated second edition was published in 1827. Taylor so thoroughly recorded his thoughts and recounted the details of his involvement in these ten churches that William Warren Sweet calls the book “the most valuable contemporary record of Baptist activity on the early frontier.” It should come as no surprise that despite the successes of missions and other societies, one of the most famous and useful contemporary documents came from a man who *opposed* these societies. Taylor, rather

⁵² Dan B. Wimberly, “Daniel Parker: Pioneer Preacher and Political Leader.” Ph.D. diss., (Texas Tech University, 1995), 99. The “Two Seed” doctrine, among others, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

than fighting alone, represented masses of people on the frontier whose beliefs clashed with those of the majority of evangelicalism in the 1820s.⁵³

Between the years 1829-1831, the frontier Antimission Movement experienced its greatest period of success. Theophilus Gates's *The Reformer* had its highest number of subscriptions during these years. Gates's office in Philadelphia received so many letters of complaint and testimony from Antimissionists throughout the country that he could not publish them all as part of his paper. At the same time, Daniel Parker attained the height of his writing ministry when from October 1829 until September 1831, he published the *Church Advocate*. In the context of the early republic, Gates and Parker were not alone in their desire to publish their thoughts for a wider audience. Since the days of the American Revolution, print culture had presented common men with the opportunity to have their beliefs read and respected by others. Since most yeomen lived agricultural lives which did not allow them to travel extensively, many resorted to spreading their beliefs through print. Like Taylor, Campbell, Gates, and hundreds of others, Parker took advantage of this tradition. He saw the missionaries and their "many errors ingeniously circulating through" religious periodicals all over the West, and felt compelled to respond in kind. When he began writing the *Church Advocate* in 1829, he denied writing for fame. Instead, he claimed, he "felt it [his] duty to set up truth" against lies. The missions system had not ceased from spreading lies and deceit, and neither had the chief of all the missionary schemers, John Mason Peck.⁵⁴

⁵³ Young, Introduction to Taylor's *A History of Ten Baptist Churches*, 1; Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, 113.

⁵⁴ Lambert, *The Rise*, 197-201; Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 282.

Throughout the *Church Advocate*, especially in its final months, Parker participated in an ongoing war of words with Peck regarding the missions system. At the same time Parker published the *Church Advocate*, Peck published his own periodicals: the *Pioneer of the Valley of the Mississippi*, and from 1830-1831, *The Western Baptist*. The two rivals wrote to and about each other in their respective periodicals, always gathering evidence from followers against the other. While Parker attacked from his base in Illinois, Peck continued to travel throughout Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Kentucky in support of the missions plan. Parker kept up with Peck's writings, comings, and goings, and always suspected him of conniving on behalf of eastern societies against the West. Had he the means, Parker would have written, traveled, preached, and debated much more directly with Peck. But because he could not travel as extensively, Parker had to participate in the war from his "periodical watch-tower" in Illinois and Indiana. Still, with subscribers as far away as New York, Virginia, and Louisiana, Parker's proclamations spread much further than he could have done in person.⁵⁵

Considering the financial struggles he went through in order to write and print this periodical for two years, it seems clear that at the very least, Parker genuinely meant what he said. Not only was Parker writing and editing the paper himself, but when he did not receive due payment for subscriptions, he financed it himself. Of course, he also continued to work and keep his farm so that he could take care of his wife and children. All of these responsibilities constantly plagued Parker with uncertainty about his ability

⁵⁵ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 10 (July 1831): 217; Wimberly, *Daniel Parker*, 178-79.

to continue writing in the future. In April 1830, he expressed doubts about the paper lasting through the year. He did not have enough money to continue financing it alone, and he definitely did not have time to make the fifty-mile roundtrip to the nearest printer every month. By June, he had recovered enough to believe he might last one year more. However, the funds did not flow in as he expected. In September 1831, he felt compelled to publish his last issue, “not having any thing like enough money to defray this year’s expenses.” That issue of the *Church Advocate* was the last substantial piece of writing that Parker would publish in his lifetime.⁵⁶

Despite his financial troubles, Parker continued to influence the direction of the Antimission Movement, even after he stopped writing. His name and teachings spread throughout the South and West in the early 1830s, gaining support for the Antimission Movement. In April, 1831, a Tennessean preacher complained to Peck about his community being “plagued more with [Parker’s] antinomian doctrines...than any other error.” In Washington County, Kentucky, members of many of the local churches had begun questioning not only the missions societies, but other reforms, such as the “Temperance cause.” One man explained this growing suspicion by claiming that it arose because “the Baptists there were much under the influence of Daniel Parker.” In Illinois and Missouri, pastor Jacob Bower cautioned the local churches in 1832 to “be ware of Daniel parker and his two seed doctrine.” Sometimes famously, sometimes

⁵⁶ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 7 (Apr. 1830): 162; vol. I, no. 9 (June 1830): 193; vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 285.

infamously, Parker's reputation played a major role in the growth of the Antimission Movement.⁵⁷

Antimissionists' success, however, came at a costly price. At the same time the movement was gaining steam in the early 1830s, divisions began to occur between the three major leaders: Parker, Taylor, and Campbell. One of the main weaknesses in Parker's leadership was that he simply had no tact. He spoke so "plain and pointed" that he often alienated those who only disagreed with minor portions of his theology or practice. In addition, many people found his "Two Seeds" theology too controversial (or heretical) to follow. This doctrine alone was reason enough for men like Taylor to separate themselves from Parker.⁵⁸

Alexander Campbell contributed to the divisions within the Antimission Movement possibly more than any other. When Campbell and his followers began rejecting all kinds of creeds, systems of doctrine, and orthodox methods of practicing the sacraments, most conservative antimissionist Baptists refused to continue in fellowship with them. Beginning in 1829, associations from Pennsylvania to Kentucky began excluding congregations and individuals who held to Campbellist doctrines and practices. As a result, Campbell broke from the Baptists in 1832 and formed a new sect, the Disciples of Christ. In addition, he stopped publishing *The Christian Baptist* and began a new journal: *The Millennial Harbinger*. Both Taylor and Parker constantly wrote against Campbell's beliefs and actions, believing them to be against the principles

⁵⁷ In Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 10 (July 1831): 222; William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1850: Vol. III: The Congregationalists* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), 261; Sweet, *Baptists*, 207.

⁵⁸ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 6 (Mar. 1831): 121

of Christianity and the Baptist Church. Parker expressed his low view of Campbellism by remarking that he worried less about it than about “missionism,” because while missionaries committed the heinous crime of “stealing the minds of the saints,” Campbellism merely duped “the unrenowned in heart.” That Parker believed most of Campbell’s followers were unregenerate is ironic, considering that Campbell was the primary voice calling for everyone else in the American Church to repent! Thus in 1831, the Antimission Movement stood on the precipice, at its greatest height yet, but in danger of falling from it soon.⁵⁹

The Antimission Movement in 1831

In the following three chapters, I will suspend the narrative in order to delve more deeply into the beliefs of the Antimissionists. As should be clear by this point, the Antimission Movement represented more than mere sectional squabbling. While missionaries continued to provide reports of the lack of religion on the frontier into the 1830s, Antimissionists made it clear that such accusations were false. The missionaries’ accusations of irreligion in the West, in fact, testify that they experienced much opposition to their own religious plans. What missionaries considered irreligion, Antimissionists considered orthodoxy. In some cases, what missionaries considered religion, Antimissionists considered lies. Those who opposed the missions system, whether leaders or followers, did so with commitment, because they believed it was right to do so.

⁵⁹ Young, *A History*, 68-74; Posey, *The Baptist Church*, 121, 70.

CHAPTER III

THEOLOGY: DOCTRINAL, EXPERIMENTAL, AND PRACTICAL

The Antimission Movement was above all else, a religious movement. Likewise, the people involved in the Antimission Movement, particularly the leaders, were religious people. Therefore, we must first understand their theology and their professed dedication to God if we hope to understand their lives or their involvement in the Antimission Movement. Daniel Parker proclaimed the centrality of religion in his choices and challenged his readers to do the same when he wrote:

Let each one duly consider the danger of living upon a religion that will desert them in death, and never inculcate a doctrine, support a religion, nor defend a principle, which they would fear to risk eternity on. Are we willing to risk it on our system of religion?⁶⁰

The obvious answer for Parker was a resounding “yes.” He considered his doctrine “the food of [his soul]” and because of it, he moved his family in and out of several states, wrote hundreds of pages, fought endless theological and ecclesiastical battles, and endured criticism for the rest of his life. As a result, many Antimissionists who followed the leadership of men like Parker experienced some of the same.⁶¹

Because these people based their actions squarely upon their theology, the historian has an obligation to assume that they actually meant what they said. Granted, believing that most of their thoughts and words were genuine does not take away from the fact that Antimissionists, like all humans, acted at times based on emotion, biases, or

⁶⁰ Daniel Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 2, (Nov. 1829): 48.

⁶¹ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 10, (July 1830): 226.

self-interest. These faults, however, do not take away from the sincerity of their belief or their opposition to missions societies. Parker confessed, “I am not a Baptist because other men are, but because I believe that the word and spirit of the living God, has, and does teach me to worship God in that way.” With a common-sense reading of Scripture, his belief in the testimony of the Spirit to his heart, and his loyalty to the local church and community, Parker was destined to be a Baptist. As any good Baptist would have, Parker passionately believed that the Spirit of God had inspired men in the past to write the words of the Bible for the instruction and edification of all believers. Similarly, he believed that the Spirit continued to speak to individual Christians in the present. So when he and the Antimissionists expressed the belief that God had taught him to believe in a particular way, he truly believed it. He and thousands of others opposed the missions societies for *theological* reasons first – because they *believed* that the societies promulgated “false religion [and] false doctrine.” If we treat their professions as facades that cover supposedly hidden motives, we do them a disservice.⁶²

To frame my discussion of antimissionist theology, I will use Parker’s understanding of “the christian religion” as consisting in three points: “the doctrinal,

⁶² Daniel Parker, *A Supplement or Explanation of my Views on the Two Sides: Taken from Genesis, 3d Chapter, and Part of the 15th Verse* (Vandalia: Robert Blackwell, 1826), 1; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 1, (Oct. 1829): 1. In regard to the Antimissionists using religion as a façade, I reject the idea that Parker, Taylor, and the people of the Antimission Movement believed in doctrines such as predestination because it helped them cope with their low social status or with psychological shortcomings. One can find this argument in the writings of several historians, including T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 155-58 and Dan Wimberly, “Daniel Parker: Pioneer Preacher and Political Leader” (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1995), 319-20.

experimental, and practical.”⁶³ For Parker, the doctrinal portion of religion consisted of belief while the experimental portion referred to how the passions and affections of a person were made alive by the Spirit and wedded to those beliefs. Finally, the practical part of Christianity referred to how a person lived and interacted with the world around him in light of his belief and passion. Because Parker believed so resolutely in the work of God in human lives, he often referred to the whole of Christianity as an “experimental religion,” meaning that a person could not merely dabble in religious beliefs and practices and still claim to be a true Christian. Experimental religion had to originate in the supernatural work of the Spirit and end with a changed human heart for it to be genuine.⁶⁴ Only by first understanding Antimissionists’ theology, particularly their focus on solid doctrine, the spiritual nature of religion, and necessity of faithful adherence to these beliefs, can we properly understand their vehement opposition to the missions societies of the East.

⁶³ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 1, (Oct. 1829): 5-6. Parker uses this division constantly, most notably in the previously-mentioned first issue of the *Church Advocate* and in his *Views on the Two Seeds*. Throughout this paper, I will primarily use the writings of Daniel Parker to examine the theology of the Antimission Movement. However, it is important to understand that most of his beliefs were common among those who opposed the missionary organizations. Other leaders, such as John Taylor and Alexander Campbell, expressed similar beliefs regarding the missions societies, as did their readers, who often had their opinions published in the leaders’ periodicals and other writings.

⁶⁴ See, *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 1, (Oct. 1829): 4-5 and *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 4, (Jan. 1830): 95. Parker’s understood the need for an “experimental” religion that emphasized a change in the heart and will of a person rather than a spiritual experience. He rejected much of the revival culture of the Second Great Awakening which emphasized spiritual conversion experiences as signs of true Christianity. In this sense, he followed in the tradition of Jonathan Edwards who drew a distinct line between “true...saving affections” and mere “experiences.” See Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, reprint (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 19.

Doctrinal and Experimental Religion

Parker may have divided his understanding of Christianity into three parts, but the first two parts – the doctrinal and experimental – always appeared together. A natural understanding of *doctrines* could never make a person right with God unless an *experience* of spiritual apprehension came with it. “The Christian religion is, strictly speaking, spiritual,” Parker explained. Doctrine had to be applied to the soul “in order to make it a life-giving ‘word.’” Just as doctrine without experience was dead, so experience without doctrine was worthless. On the basis of this belief, Parker constantly criticized the missions societies, for according to him, their religious work had the “*appearance* of zeal and love,” but without biblical doctrine to support it. Without doctrine, such zeal and love was worthless at best, evil at worst.⁶⁵

Antimissionists valued doctrine, but they tended to examine and develop their own from a very insulated point of view. They did not support complete individualism in doctrinal matters, for such a view would downplay the authority of Scripture and the importance of community. They did, however, tend to deemphasize the opinions of churches outside of their geographical area as well as historical understandings of doctrine. For the most part, Antimissionists rejected historic doctrinal systems or labels. They took on names such as “Baptist” or “predestinarian,” but they did so because of their understanding of Scripture, not because a previous group or leader had passed the name down to them or because the neighboring church recommended it. For example,

⁶⁵ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 26; vol. I, no. 1 (Oct. 1829): 2, my emphasis added. Parker accused the missionaries with the same language in *The Second Dose*, 47, 83.

although Daniel Parker, John Taylor, and many of their followers tended to have a historically Calvinist understanding of salvation, they resolutely rejected the label of “Calvinist.”⁶⁶ Parker claimed that “the Baptist church in faith in practice, existed before John Calvin was born.” He admitted that Calvin and Luther accomplished advancement for the true Church during the Reformation, but because they also maintained what Parker called “anti-christian and wrong principles,” he would not directly associate himself or his followers with their names or systems of doctrine.⁶⁷

Similarly, Antimissionists rejected historic confessions and books of discipline. Parker never mentioned specific examples, but he presumably referred to the dominant documents of the day, such the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Baptist Confession of Faith, or the Book of Common Prayer. Such systems of doctrinal and ecclesiastical rules were to Antimissionists, unnecessary for salvation and daily living. Not only that, but Antimissionists saw a danger in following such prescriptions. By holding closely to an extrabiblical document, people risked falling into the trap discussed earlier: trusting

⁶⁶ T. Scott Miyakawa, Leo Hirrell, Cecil Lambert, and many others who have examined antebellum reform and responses to it tend to use the term “Calvinism” in order to describe the religion of groups like the New School Presbyterians or the Antimissionists. However, this term more specifically refers to soteriological subjects such as election, predestination, and atonement, which John Calvin and his followers preached. Using this term alone has two problems. First, as discussed in Chapter Two, Daniel Parker thought Calvin, although helpful in some areas, taught doctrines which were at odds with Baptist beliefs. In addition, the term “Calvinist” ignores a broader tradition and array of theologians within the Christian Church which embraced these beliefs about soteriology, yet taught them before Calvin (such as Martin Luther and Augustine of Hippo). As a result, I will use the term “Reformed” much more often than “Calvinist” in reference to the belief systems of the Antimissionists and groups such as the Presbyterians who embraced similar theological frameworks. The term “Reformed” has no direct connection with the reform societies of this period.

⁶⁷ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 9, (June 1831): 216; Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds* (Vandalia: Robert Blackwell, 1826), 19; *The Second Dose of Doctrine on the Two Seeds, Dealt out in Broken Doses Designed to Purge the Armenian Stuff and Dross out of the Church of Christ and Hearts and Heads of Saints* (Vincennes: Elihu Stout, 1826), 79.

doctrine with their natural minds without any spiritual apprehension of it. To guard against this danger while still maintaining some semblance of orthodoxy, Parker advocated that congregations create “an abstract of principles.” Such a framework would help churches maintain unity and purity without creating unnecessary regulations. Considering this advice, Parker’s congregation in Illinois wrote a constitution for themselves. Not only did the doctrines, rules, and regulations contained therein help to solidify an individual congregation, but they set them apart from groups that clearly maintained different religious principles, groups like the missions societies.⁶⁸

Antimissionists’ commitment to religious confessions and books of order waxed and waned, but their commitment to the Bible remained resolute. Regardless of their denominational affiliation, they considered the Bible the most important and only binding rule over their lives. Few frontier families maintained home libraries, but if a home owned only one book, it would be safe to assume that it was a Bible. Like Parker, most frontier Christians “spent but little time in consulting the opinions of others” in books, but instead focused their spiritual attention on the Bible alone. Antimissionists revered the Bible so highly that even though they opposed most of the benevolent societies of the day, they often refrained from opposing Bible societies. While they believed many tract, temperance, and missions societies had incorrect theological foundations and selfish aims, they had a difficult time making such conclusions about the Bible societies. A group so dedicated to God’s Word could hardly oppose a society whose sole aim was the publication and distribution of it. As a result, every

⁶⁸ Parker, *The Second Dose*, 77; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 11, (Aug. 1830): 241-47.

antimissionist leader, including Elias Smith, John Leland, Theophilus Gates, Alexander Campbell, and even Daniel Parker, willingly “exposed a vulnerable heel to the Bible societies” by refraining from opposing them most of the time.⁶⁹

Antimissionists believed that the Bible was complete and inerrant. A man who wrote to Alexander Campbell under the assumed name Didymus declared, “The laws of our king are all written in the New Testament: it is at our peril to add to or take from them. They are, like their author, immutable in their nature, heavenly and divine.”⁷⁰ Therefore, if the Bible did not provide an explicit positive statement regarding how a person should pursue a particular goal, that person had no right to pursue it at all. This was exactly the problem Antimissionists had with the missions societies. The societies constantly tried to add to the Word in order to justify their actions. John Taylor objected to missionaries calling God “the God of missions,” not because God opposed the idea of missions, but because no such title for God existed in the Scriptures. Similarly, Parker spoke out against the missions societies on the grounds that “the mission system [had] neither precept nor example to justify its principle and practice.” Without such precepts or commands directly from Scripture, Antimissionists believed that missions societies had no right to even exist.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, 88; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 9, (June 1831): 193; Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 311.

⁷⁰ Alexander Campbell, *The Millennial Harbinger*, vol. III, no. 8 (Aug. 1832): 389.

⁷¹ John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions* (Franklin County, KY, 1820), 29; Daniel Parker, “A Public Address to the Baptist Society and Friends of Religion in General on the Principle and Practice of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions or the United States of America,” (Vincennes: Stout & Osborn, 1820), 22-23.

While Antimissionists claimed to seek specific Biblical support for their beliefs and actions, they saw in the missions societies a proclivity to act according their own beliefs. This dichotomy surfaced most often in regard to doctrines of soteriology.⁷² Parker and his followers believed “that salvation from beginning to end [was] wholly of the Lord.” One reason he and so many of his friends opposed the societies and their leaders was that rather than focusing on the sovereign work of God in salvation, they elevated the role of human actions. As a result, Antimissionists accused missionaries of endorsing a salvation which depended on the work of men, not God. This system of doctrine, historically opposed to Calvinism, was known as Arminianism. Its namesake comes from Jacobus Arminius, who lived and wrote in the late days of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. In response to John Calvin’s theology spreading throughout Europe, the followers of Arminius began promulgating five key soteriological doctrines which directly opposed Calvinist soteriology. While Calvinism heralded *God’s* work in salvation, Arminianism emphasized the ability, choices, and free will of *humans*. According to Antimissionists, missionaries’ Arminian leanings caused them to elevate themselves as bearers of salvation while disregarding the work of God. Whether this accurately described every emissary of every missions society did not matter to those opposed to them. In the eyes of the Antimissionists, the societies as a whole seemed to endorse this man-centered theology.⁷³

⁷² The term “soteriology” refers to the branch of Christian theology which deals with matters of salvation. Soteriology includes the study of original sin, predestination, grace, faith, atonement, and other such doctrines.

⁷³ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831): 265.

A person's soteriological beliefs actually consisted of several more specific doctrines, including original sin and predestination. For Antimissionists, the verdict on human nature was clear: totally depraved. Understanding that all humans were born into the world corrupt in body, mind, and soul was so important to Parker that he believed "a correct knowledge" of this doctrine acted as "one of the main keys to unlock the whole mystery" of salvation. Without a correct understanding of the doctrines of original sin or total depravity, one would surely "err on every other" subject. Far from depressing a person, an appreciation for these doctrines actually opened up one's ability to understand the nature of God. If a man viewed his own nature as anything better than corrupt, he could never understand the purity and holiness of God's nature. John Taylor, upon realizing his own corrupt nature, fell on his knees not because he delighted in demeaning himself, but because he acknowledged that according to the standard of "God's justice," he deserved "condemnation." What angered men like him so much about many missions organizations was that he believed they spoke too highly of their own abilities. What they seemed to forget was that those same abilities meant nothing in comparison to an omnipotent and holy God.⁷⁴

The two groups also clashed over one of the perpetually-disputed doctrines of Christendom: predestination. Antimissionists, including Parker and Taylor, believed that before time began, God chose for himself those whom He would save, thus determining the outcome of their lives before they began. Regardless of whether people

⁷⁴ *Church Advocate*, vol. I., no. 12 (Sept. 1830): 266; *Views on the Two Seeds*, 38; Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 68.

believed or despised it, the doctrine of predestination remained a central point of discussion and debate. In 1835, a man named Barnabas wrote in the periodical *The Baptist*, “We shall view the doctrine of *predestination* as the centre to which all the doctrines of the Bible converge.” Because it was so central, everything one believed about life and salvation related in a specific way to what one believed about predestination. The central question concerning salvation revolved around which party was responsible, God or man. “Did the sinner elect or choose God?” Parker asked, “or has God elected or chose the sinner?” For the true Christian, Parker claimed, “God” was the clear answer. The answer he saw in the beliefs of the missions societies was “man” – the wrong answer. By believing in the efficacy of their missions work for salvation rather than in a divinely-predestined work, they practically spat in God’s face.⁷⁵

Because of the Antimissionists’ belief in predestination, their opponents commonly accused them of practicing antinomianism. Antinomians had historically believed that since God had already predestined everyone to either damnation or salvation, it did not matter how a person lived. Antimissionists wholly rejected this belief and resented being accused of holding to it. In an 1831 letter to the *Chronicle* in Georgetown, Kentucky, Parker complained that the editor, Uriel Chambers, “represented the doctrine contended for by me, as high keyed Antinomian sentiments...[which] would

⁷⁵ R.B.C. Powell, ed., *The Baptist*, vol. I, no. 5 (May 1835): 78; Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 38. Bertram Wyatt-Brown incorrectly equates the belief in God’s providence in predestination with “pagan notions of Fate” or fatalism. Reformed Christians, including the Antimissionists, have always made a fundamental distinction between these two beliefs. Since Fate could not be changed, belief in it led its adherents to disregard human choice and responsibility as meaningless. On the other hand, in the Reformed Christian tradition, a belief in divine predestination was always accompanied by a belief in the importance of human choice and responsibility as parts of the salvation process. See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 27-28.

go to destroy the idea of the responsibility of...the human family to God.” A Baptist preacher in Tennessee agreed with Mr. Chambers and wrote that the Christians in the area were “plagued...with antinomian doctrines.” John Mason Peck also accused Antimissionists of antinomianism, claiming that because they did not properly understand “Divine purposes and means to accomplish them,” they therefore “had no conception of human duty and responsibility.”⁷⁶ Not only did Antimissionists decry this heresy, but their leaders went so far as to preach the opposite, namely, that salvation by grace should *lead* to good works, not make them unnecessary. A true experience of salvation could never lead a person to accept such an apathetic system of doctrine. Parker wrote definitively, “It is wicked presumption to say, that if I am elected...[I can] go on to sin and rebel against God.” He went on to warn “the lazy or ignorant Predestinarian” reader who might be “lulled to sleep” under the false conclusion that because he was saved by grace, there was “nothing left for him to do.”⁷⁷ No intent

⁷⁶ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 6 (Mar. 1831): 132-36.; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 10 (July 1831): 222; John Mason Peck, *Forty Years of Pioneer Life: Memoir of John Mason Peck, D.D., edited from His Journals and Correspondence*, ed., Rufus Babcock (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 110. Historians have made similar mistakes with their accusations of antinomianism. In his article on the Antimission Movement, Bertram Wyatt-Brown claimed that many of its participants “cared little about the slave’s lot” precisely because “they believed nearly all mankind was fated to endure God’s predestined wrath.” See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture” *The Journal of Southern History* 36, no.4 (Nov. 1970): 524. His assumption that Antimissionists’ belief in predestination led directly to apathy in regard to the slavery question is incorrect. In fact, Parker’s actions regarding the slavery question testified to the opposite. While part of the Illinois State Assembly from 1822-1826, Parker staunchly verbalized his opposition to the practice of slavery. As part of his predestinarian beliefs, he actually cared *much* about the slave’s lot. While it is true that no group ever used the Antimission Movement as a vehicle for lobbying for abolition, this lack of moral action had nothing to do with their belief in predestination. Abolition was simply not an avenue they chose to pursue. See Dan Wimberly, *Frontier Religion: Elder Daniel Parker, His Religious and Political Life*. (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), ix, 40-45.

⁷⁷ Parker, *Second Dose*, 14, 36.

listener or reader could have misunderstood such pronouncements. True biblical doctrine, far from leaving Christians idle, left them with plenty to learn, and plenty to do.

The Doctrine of the Two-Seeds

Antimissionists' preoccupation with theology and its implications is what caused many of their divisions. The leaders, not to mention the thousands of members of the Antimission Movement, never agreed on a single, systematic theology. Because of this, a discussion of every branch of the antimissionist theology would fill volumes and ultimately provide little in the way of interpreting central themes in the movement. However, one antimissionist doctrine stands out from among all others not only as a unique belief, but as a tool for interpreting the movement itself: Daniel Parker's doctrine of the "Two Seeds."⁷⁸ Throughout his periodical and in two pamphlets dedicated solely to this doctrine, Parker boldly "declared the facts of the existence of the two seeds" as part of "the whole counsel of God." It is important to know that this doctrine did not represent "official" antimissionist theology, nor did every person who opposed the missions societies subscribe to it. For example, Richard Newport, an avid supporter of Daniel Parker in Illinois, opposed it. In a letter to Uriel Chambers, an opponent of Parker's, Newport claimed that "not...all of us cordially embrace every thing [Parker]

⁷⁸ The doctrine of the Two Seeds did not originate with Daniel Parker. Although no one has definitively traced its origin, "Elder [Richard] Newport, a close associate of Parker in the Wabash District Association, claimed credit for launching" it. Parker claimed to have had his "attention called to the doctrine...by a few remarks made by an old brother," most likely, Newport. After hearing the doctrine for the first time around 1812, he "rejected it as heresy" and "stroved against the forcible evidences presented" in favor of it. However, by 1826, he had come to adamantly support the doctrine. In that year, he published his thoughts for the first time under the title *Views on the Two Seeds*. See Wimberly, *Frontier Religion*, 72-73; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 279.

has written on the Two Seeds.” What makes this doctrine of Parker’s important is that even though some of his readers and followers rejected it, it remained a rallying point for them in the fight against the missions societies. When the missions societies sought to discredit Parker or any congregation involved in the movement, they often brought up the contentious doctrine of the Two Seeds as incriminating evidence. When Antimissionists replied, many did so either in full support of Parker and this doctrine, or in full support of him *despite* this doctrine. The aforementioned Newport, despite his disagreement with the doctrine of the Two Seeds, declared on behalf of himself and his friends, “We have sustained Parker, and expect still to do so, while he continues to pursue his undeviating course in defence of truth against error.” This doctrine was not only a foundational one for Parker, but a central issue in the fight against the missions societies.⁷⁹

The doctrine of the Two Seeds attempted to explain the timeless battle between two parties: God and his seed versus Satan and his seed. Parker discovered these two seeds in his reading of the first three chapters of Genesis. The first, referred to as “the seed of the woman,” had been made by God and placed into Eve, via her creation out of Adam. This seed represented more than it seemed. According to Scripture, Parker claimed, this seed “was no doubt Christ in the...true sense of the word.” More than that, he claimed that all “the saints” of the true Church were represented in this good seed. Historically, most Christians had believed that Christ had spiritually made himself one

⁷⁹ Parker, *A Supplement*, 2; in *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831): 253; vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831): 253.

with the Church, symbolized by a man and his bride joining together in marriage.

Parker, on the other hand, took this symbolism literally. Rather than viewing the seed as a spiritual representation of Christ and the Church to come, he claimed that they both literally and physically came from this seed. In other words, when God placed the good seed in Eve, through Adam, he literally injected Christ and the Church into the world as well.⁸⁰

Parker also believed that Satan (otherwise known as the Serpent) was active in the world and opposed to God and his work. Just as literally as he believed the Holy Spirit guided Christians, so Parker believed that the Devil sought to destroy Christians, especially spiritual leaders. For every godly preacher that went forth, Parker claimed that “the Devil would send out prophets or preachers” as well. The Devil’s influence was so widespread that Parker considered him “near omnipresent.” Similarly, John Taylor worried just after his conversion that Satan was “not far off” and seeking to destroy him. This awareness of the Devil’s presence in daily life was not limited to Christian leaders. Most evangelicals on the antebellum frontier, including the Antimissionists, believed that the Devil was an active spiritual entity. Leaders’ warnings of the Devil’s activity and presence thus struck a common chord with everyone. Thus far, Parker’s Two Seeds had raised questions, but had remained within the bounds of general evangelical acceptance.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 3-5, 10.

⁸¹ Parker, *A Second Dose*, 42; *A Supplement*, 7. Parker expressed his belief that Satan worked his will through the missionaries, in *Church Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1829): 11. He also believed that the persecution he endured came as a result of the Devil pouring it out on him, in *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 273; Taylor, “Thoughts on Mission,” 70. Taylor also believed the Devil was at work

Where Parker stepped into controversial territory was with his beliefs regarding Satan and the second seed of Genesis 3. The orthodox interpretation of this second, evil seed was like that of the good seed: spiritual and symbolic. The Devil's "seed" symbolized the sin and corruption which would ravage the entire human race after Adam and Eve's original sin. Again, Parker interpreted Scripture much more literally. He believed that the seed of Satan was literal and physical. By injecting his evil seed into Eve, Satan would literally infect the whole world. From the original bad seed would flow all the sin and death the world would ever know. In addition, Parker believed that "the Serpent's seed" contained all "the Non-Elect, which were not created in Adam, the original stock." God had used the good seed to produce all of the righteous, elect people the world would know, while Satan had fathered all of the sinful, non-elect to come.⁸²

This belief in Satan's role in the world led Parker to develop a controversial theodicy, one similar to a heresy Christians had condemned for more than 1500 years.⁸³ Parker believed that God was sovereign and good, yet he also observed evil in the world. The claim that God was somehow responsible for allowing this evil to enter the world was to Parker "a contemptible idea of God." No good god, in Parker's mind, could ever permit such a thing. So, rather than leaving the existence of evil as a mystery veiled by God's sovereignty, Parker declared a "new" idea:

This must be the fact...The works of darkness...this mystery of iniquity, [and] this source from whence the viperous generation has sprung, exists in itself,

in the missions societies. See *Thoughts on Missions*, 12; See Chapter 1 of Christine L. Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), especially pp. 73-76.

⁸² Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 7.

⁸³ A "theodicy" is a defense of God, especially his goodness, love, and justice, in light of the continuing existence of evil in the world.

and never received its origin from the fountain of perfection, but is the opposite to God; the source from whence has flowed all sin, iniquity, sorrow, and death.⁸⁴

Parker explained the continuing existence of evil by simply believing that God was not responsible for its existence in the first place. The idea that there were two opposing powers in the universe which had not gained their existence from each other was not really new. It had been around at least since the prophet Manes espoused his philosophy of Manichaeism in the third century. However, Parker's claim that the Devil was not created by God, but rather was his own source of life was definitely a "new" doctrine to many Christians in the West.⁸⁵

Parker supported his belief that the Devil had existed apart from God's creation with a characteristically Baptist, Antimissionist principle: only gleaning from Scripture what was specifically stated. Because he did not "recollect of reading in the Bible" anything about the creation of "the spirits of...the Devil and his angels," Parker concluded that they must have arisen from an "invisible mystery of iniquity." If Christians could believe the mystery of God's self-existence from all eternity, then they could believe the same about evil. For Parker, this belief was both logical and biblical. Any "candid reader" would understand that they had to believe in an evil power that existed opposite from and independent of God. Otherwise, they would be forced to

⁸⁴ Parker, *A Second Dose*, 13.

⁸⁵ Manichaeism was a 3rd-century blend of elements from Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. Although the church immediately declared it a heresy, it lived on in name for centuries more. Even after sects which bore the Manichean name died out, the basic idea of two eternally opposing powers, one good and one bad, continued to appear. One such reincarnation was Daniel Parker's doctrine of the Two Seeds.

believe that God, “the fountain of perfection,” had somehow allowed evil to flow from himself – for Parker, an impossibility.⁸⁶

Parker does not seem to have been aware of the historically heretical connotations his doctrine carried. However, when he immediately began experiencing opposition to it in the late 1820’s, he realized the theological predicament in which he had put himself and hastily tried to dig his way out. To distance himself from accusations of Manichaeism, Parker attempted to distinguish between “a self subsisting” and a “self existing” being, as well as between the acts of “creating” and “begetting.” By creating the first distinction, he sought to show that even though he believed the Devil had always *existed* from his own source, he had no power to *subsist* or sustain himself outside of the providence of God. So even though there were two eternal powers, he hoped to emphasize the good one over the bad. He believed that the second distinction would depict Satan’s “begetting” of life through his evil seed as a weak imitator of God’s almighty “power to create.” Neither distinction held up to intense scrutiny, and some of his readers understood that. In truth, Parker never pursued either distinction too deeply himself. They had only arisen in the first place because they had to be created (or begetted?) in order to support his theodicy.⁸⁷

In the end, Parker hoped that the Two Seeds would focus his readers’ attention on the limited and evil power of the Devil (despite his eternal existence), the sovereign and good power of God, and the constant battle between the two. While the forces of

⁸⁶ Parker, *A Second Dose*, 23; Parker, *A Supplement*, 8; *A Second Dose*, 26.

⁸⁷ Parker, *A Second Dose*, 16; *Views on the Two Seeds*, 11.

evil might fight successfully for a time, he continued to believe that nothing “transpired in the providence of God, but what was designed for the accomplishment (in the end) of this noble work.” With this statement, Parker sought to defend the character of God against anyone who might detract from his glory. By denying the Devil’s self-existence, he believed that the missionaries had accused God of both sin and weakness. If God could not defeat a being He created, how powerful could He be? Parker believed that the doctrine of the Two Seeds was the weapon he could use to defend God’s honor against such attacks. However, in the process of promulgating a doctrine which most considered heretical, he ruined his credibility with his enemies as even a remotely-orthodox preacher.⁸⁸

Still, the maverick doctrine of the Two Seeds was no local anomaly. In 1832, Jacob Bower, a Baptist preacher in Illinois, warned an association of churches “to be ware of Daniel parker and his two seed doctrine.” In 1835, an editorial in the Nashville-based *The Baptist* lamented “such doctrines as that of “*the two seeds*,” [have] corrupted...Tennessee.” Along with other controversies in the state, this writer believed the “Two Seeds” doctrine would lead to the same type of trouble, captivity, and death that Ancient Israel experienced.” As the Antimission Movement spanned the country, particularly the South and West, so Parker’s doctrine of the Two Seeds gained fame and infamy that was just as widespread.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 12.

⁸⁹ Jacob Bower, *The Autobiography of Jacob Bower: A Frontier Baptist Preacher and Missionary*, in *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830*, ed. William Warren Sweet (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 207; R.B.C. Powell, ed., *The Baptist*, vol. I, no. 3 (Mar. 1835): 33, 35.

The reason that understanding the doctrine of the Two Seeds is essential is that it represented far more than peculiar theology. Claiming belief in this doctrine enabled Antimissionists to construct their entire worldview around it, including their passionate rejection of the missions societies. In his *Views on the Two Seeds*, Parker explained that everyone on Earth could be divided into two generations, one which came from the good seed, and one from the bad. Through Eve, the good seed had generated God's people, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, and of course, true Baptists. The evil seed, however, had generated every evil on Earth, from Cain to the Pope. And Parker had "no hesitation...in saying that the true church never sprang from, nor come out, nor through the Pope of Rome." It was here that he connected the line of the evil seed to his present-day enemies, the missions societies: "I am equally bold to say, that each society, whose origin can be traced from the Pope of Rome...is evidently one of the daughters...of the mother of harlots...or anti-christian." For Parker, all of human history could be reduced to "a short biography of...two generations," one anti-christian, and one true Christian. As a result of this theology, he could lump all of his enemies, whether religious, political, or economic, into one big family of evil. In 1831, the most visible and present of these enemies were the missionaries⁹⁰

Reflecting upon how Parker formulated the doctrine of the Two Seeds and why his theology was so successful provides an avenue toward understanding the Antimission Movement's theology as a whole. The frontier provided an excellent opportunity for Antimissionists, particularly Baptists, to oppose otherwise popular

⁹⁰ Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 17-18, 15.

groups on the basis of theology. Baptists believed that no human spiritual authority existed outside of the local church. Thus, without national ecclesiastical oversight to snuff out budding local theologies, people like Parker were able to develop and promulgate their beliefs relatively free of hindrance. As a result, Parker and the Antimissionists were able to develop their theology and worldviews as independent thinkers. The doctrine of the Two Seeds did not flow out of a historically Baptist, Protestant, or even Christian tradition. Yet, because it stressed the fundamental belief in the holiness of God, aimed to defend God's honor, allowed frontier Christians to construct a clear worldview, and did so by interpreting the Bible in a literal sense, it was able to take root and grow among Antimissionists.

Practical Religion

As important as the doctrine of the Two Seeds was to Parker and the progress of the Antimission Movement, it would have meant little without practical application. After all, if a person had a clear understanding of biblical doctrine and had truly experienced salvation, practical effects would naturally overflow. Doctrines and spiritual experiences always led to "an orderly walk in the examples of Christ." Because the practical portion of religion was by nature more visible, the controversies over religious practice tended to be the most heated between Antimissionists and missions societies. Although they desired to live in agreement and fellowship with other Christians, Antimissionists refused to compromise "at the expense of truth." As a result, what could have been small-scale disagreements mushroomed into full-scale theological wars. As stated previously, when Parker experienced opposition of any kind, he

believed he had only three options: quit preaching, acknowledge that he was incorrect, or “draw the sword and fight.” Not surprisingly, Parker never went with options one and two.⁹¹

Other than the ever-present battles against the Devil and non-Christians, Antimissionists most often found themselves in conflict with two groups: Arminians on one hand, and fellow Baptists on the other.⁹² One reason Parker clung so tightly to his doctrine of the Two Seeds was that he believed it his best weapon in the fight against “the Armenian errors.” Because Arminians rejected all doctrines associated with the Reformed view of salvation, including election, predestination, and the perseverance of the saints, Parker claimed that their beliefs differed little from the heretical doctrine of universal salvation. He would not stand for the consideration of such principles as anything but complete antipodes to his religion.⁹³

As a result, Antimissionists engaged in perpetual confrontation with Arminians in all realms of life. On one level, antimissionist leaders viewed the war with Arminians

⁹¹ Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 20; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 1 (Oct. 1829): 5; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 270-73.

⁹² The term “Arminian” never referred to a particular Christian denomination. Instead, it referred to any person or group who rejected the Reformed doctrines of Calvin and Luther (especially soteriological doctrines). Some of the largest groups which held to Arminian theology were Methodists, Catholics, and substantial numbers of Baptists.

⁹³ The doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints” states that all those whom God ordains to salvation will surely retain that salvation. Calvinists developed this doctrine in response to Arminians’ claims that people could lose their by an act of their free will just as they had gained it by their free will. The doctrine of “universal salvation” stated that regardless of one’s decisions in life, God would eventually offer salvation and eternity in heaven to everyone. See Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 14-15. For a discussion of how Parker and the Antimissionists believed Predestinarian and Arminian principles necessarily stood in opposition to one another, see the following: *Church Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 27; *Church Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Dec. 1829): 49; John G. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South: 1815 to the Present* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 77-79. John Taylor believed that his friend’s theological change from Predestinarian to Arminian was no simple matter; it meant that he had “warped off very much” from the correct path. See Taylor’s *Thoughts on Missions*, 51.

as personal affronts. “Arminians from their lurking place,” Parker exclaimed, “seem equally engaged for my destruction.” John Taylor believed that he needed to respond as a “thunderbolt” to the advancements of Arminians against him. Both knew, however, that the war was bigger than a few individual men; it raged on a national scale as well. As the revivals of the Second Great Awakening burned across the Northeast, particularly those led by Charles Finney, Arminianism grew exponentially. Because these meetings “broadcast[ed] democratic soteriology” in place of Calvinism’s supposed monarchical or aristocratic soteriology, many Arminians began to see Calvinism as a theology “antithetical to the American spirit” of freedom.⁹⁴

In addition to the revivals of the Second Great Awakening, the reform movements spawned by the revivals heralded the same pro-Arminian, anti-Calvinist ideals. One of the most effective ways to encourage involvement in reform societies was to stress the importance of individual action. By *choosing* to participate in reform, a person could help rid society of drunkenness, poverty, slavery, and countless other ills. In doing so, that same person could give the oppressed a better chance of hearing and responding to the revivalist’s call to salvation. Antimissionists had no qualm with revivals or reform societies in general. However, because those revivals and reform societies espoused Arminian-leaning doctrines more often than not, Antimissionists felt they had to speak out against them. As long as the Predestinarian and Arminian

⁹⁴ Wimberly, “Daniel Parker” (Ph.D. diss.), 318-19. Wimberly makes the same mistake as the Antimissionists’ contemporaries of labeling Calvinistic doctrines as opposed to ideals such as democracy and freedom. For example, he writes that Calvinism is comprised of an “arbitrary God and determinism” and extols Arminianism as the spiritual equivalent of the “social and political equality” the Revolution had brought. Nevertheless, he described well the attitudes and perceptions of many Arminians during the Second Great Awakening.

theological principles remained at war, the people and societies which held to these systems of belief were obligated to remain at war as well.⁹⁵

Even though most Antimissionists were Baptists, they found some of their worst enemies within the Baptist denomination itself. Parker once wrote, “I believe every real Baptist is a christian, and every real christian is a Baptist.” Yet even in espousing this claim of exclusivity, Antimissionists meant that only a specific kind of Baptist represented true Christianity, namely, Baptists like them. Much of the division which occurred between Baptists came as a direct result of them simply being Baptists. As mentioned earlier, Baptist congregations, especially those on the frontier, remained very insular in their practice. While a congregation in northern Illinois might support something like a missions society, a similar congregation in southern Illinois might completely oppose it. And according to traditional Baptist practices, neither could claim authority over the other’s decision. As for antimissionist Baptist congregations throughout the West, they believed that their particular brand faith and practice could be traced back to the apostles, who never mentioned anything about missions societies. John Mason Peck may have claimed to be a Baptist, but according to Parker, he was not one “of the old stamp,” and thus no Baptist at all. Alexander Campbell proclaimed himself a Baptist from 1823-1830, and Parker spoke for Baptists everywhere (even some of the missionaries) when he resentfully stated, “Mr. Campbell adds the name of baptist, to his publication, yet it is one thing to bear the name of Baptist, and another thing to be a Baptist in reality.” Campbell had claimed the exclusive name of Baptist yet had

⁹⁵ Parker, *A Second Dose*, 3; Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 52.

promulgated doctrines which encouraged the abolition of denominational differences and barriers. Men like Taylor and Parker wanted nothing of the sort. To practice uncompromised Christianity, a true Baptist embraced “sectarian principles” and shunned the idea that everyone should simply try and get along. Although Campbell and his followers may have jumped on the antissionist bandwagon, they were nothing more than “wolves in sheep’s clothing” and “imposters” in the household of true Baptists.⁹⁶

Theological Opposition to the Missions Societies

Considering the worlds of theological disagreement between missions societies and Antissionists, it is not surprising that they clashed so profoundly. It seemed that in every way, the two groups’ doctrinal and experiential religion resulted in every-day confrontations of practical religion. Supporters of these missions systems, claimed Antissionists, resorted to using the Devil’s “serpentine subtlety” in order to distort the doctrine and practice of the true Christian Church for their own benefit. Rather than adhering to the absolute truth of Scripture, they came “as nigh the truth” as possible by using biblical language, yet all the while promulgating doctrines and practices they had created themselves.⁹⁷

Missionaries often responded to this opposition by claiming that their opponents rejected the practice of missions or benevolence of any kind. Focusing once again on Antissionists’ beliefs in predestination and election, missionaries accused them of

⁹⁶ Parker, *A Second Dose*, 77; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 10 (July 1831): 223; *A Second Dose*, 76; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 1 (Oct. 1829): 3-6; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 5 (Feb. 1830): 119; Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 44, 39.

⁹⁷ Parker, *A Second Dose*, 59; *Views on the Two Seeds*, 22.

using these beliefs to justify religious laziness and apathy. John Mason Peck singled out Parker in his periodical, the *Western Baptist*, by claiming that Parker had “been long distinguished in the Wabash country for his unyielding opposition to missions, and all other benevolent operations.” It frustrated Parker and his brethren to be misrepresented in this way, as if being an Antimissionist meant that he refused good deeds like giving “an Indian a Bible, a shirt, or something to [their] relief.” Just like the accusation of antinomianism, this accusation was simply not true.⁹⁸

Not only did Parker himself reject being labeled as “opposed to the spread of the gospel” by way of missionaries, preachers, and general benevolence, but he claimed that he did not even know of one person involved in the entire Movement who stood “opposed to these things, if done in an orderly way.” Antimissionists believed that there were many of the “Lord’s sheep” scattered throughout the world who needed to hear the Gospel, whether that came through Bibles or missionaries. Far from promoting resistance to missions, Parker exhorted believers to “feel a great interest” in this sort of benevolent action. Clearly then, it was never the practice of missions or the existence of missionaries, in and of themselves, which Antimissionists opposed.⁹⁹

The people of the Antimission Movement opposed the missions societies because in virtually every facet of doctrinal, experiential, and practical religion, they saw the societies abandoning the principles of the Bible and acting according to their own terms.

⁹⁸ John Mason Peck, quoted in *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 1 (Oct. 1830): 9; Parker, *A Second Dose*, 53.

⁹⁹ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 2 (Nov. 1830): 39; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no.5 (Feb. 1830): 111; *A Second Dose*, 37. Parker stated that if God ever called him to quit his preaching and leadership at home, he would go “to any nation or people” to whom God wished to send him, in *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 269-70.

Both sides agreed that the goals of missions were good, but while Antimissionists focused on the sovereignty of God in drawing his elect to Himself, the missions societies abandoned this belief. Instead, they believed that it was their duty “to step in the place of God” in bringing about the salvation of the nations. Without questions, many missionaries exhibited much zeal and love in their endeavors. John Mason Peck traveled thousands of miles, often with much difficulty, in order to bring the Gospel to the people of the West. He professed to care so deeply for the people to whom he preached that he would “sacrifice domestic enjoyment and family interest, and devote [himself] to such a work” for the rest of his life. Yet regardless of how much love and zeal he or any other missionary might exhibit, Antimissionists claimed that they were worthless if based upon lies. Missions societies might believe that their practices were righteous, but *belief* in the validity of one’s actions and the *actual* validity of those actions were two totally different things.¹⁰⁰

Concluding Thoughts

In the end, the way in which a Christian practiced his religion was just as important as what he believed about his religion. In fact, the three parts of religion which Parker spoke of had to exist together, or not at all. True belief, followed by true experience of salvation, proved by biblical practice: this was the Antimissionist formula

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Parker, “A Public Address to the Baptist Society and Friends of Religion in General on the Principle and Practice of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions or the United States of America,” (Vincennes: Stout & Osborn, 1820), 35-36; John Mason Peck, *Forty Years*, 205-07; *Church Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1829): 2.

for true religion. For this very reason, thousands of frontier Christians refused to stand by as societies void of biblical injunction or precedent sprung up all over the country.

Adoniram Judson was one of the most renowned worldwide missionaries of the early nineteenth century. Baptist, Methodists, and all denominations alike admired the courage and self-sacrifice he exhibited in spending the majority of his life in Burma, far from his home country of the United States. During his career, he was imprisoned by the Burmese government and lost two wives and six children to disease and death, many as a direct result of his missionary ventures. In a letter published in the antimissionist-friendly *The Millennial Harbinger*, an admirer of Judson wrote, "I ONCE thought that no one...could be opposed to missionary operations, but from depravity and ignorance." With men like Judson as examples for missions ventures, few could decry the character of missionaries or the motives of their supporting societies. After years of financially supporting missionaries through the missions societies which employed them, however, the man who signed his name as "F" had changed his mind:

I think there are many, enlightened in the scriptures, who, from the best of motives, are opposed not only to the modern popular missionary operations, but to all the sectarian "benevolent schemes" of our time...I venerate the name...of Judson, and would to Heaven there were thousands such: but to the system of things under which you act, and by which supported, I cannot any longer, conscientiously, contribute my mite.¹⁰¹

For Antimissionists such as "F," the controversy over the missions societies cut to the core of their deepest beliefs. As a result, no matter how positive the objectives of the societies seemed, they could not in pure conscience do anything but oppose them.

¹⁰¹ In Alexander Campbell, ed., *The Millennial Harbinger*, vol. III, no. 8 (Sept. 1832): 446-47.

CHAPTER IV

LABOR, MONEY, AND MARKETS

Daniel Parker was a farmer. Like most yeoman farmers, he worked with his hands, on his own land, and spent most of his life with little expendable income. Because of his values, he remained suspicious of the evil tendencies of money, people who did not labor with their own hands, and economic influences from outside his home. His suspicions, however, were not primarily matters of economics; they were matters of faith. When Parker claimed that “farming was [his] only way to make a support” for his family, he had a specific, religious reason for saying so: “I avoided every thing like trade or traffic for speculation, lest I should bring a reproach on the tender cause of God.” For Parker, any labor that resembled the speculative trade and traffic of market society had the dual danger of being dishonest work and bringing dishonor to God. The people of the Antimission Movement demanded that their theology and worldview have very real and practical application in their everyday lives. This was especially true when discussing those “temporal concerns” which related to labor, money, and the market. On the surface, few subjects seem more commonplace than these. Yet for Antimissionists, these temporal concerns had deeply religious and eternal significance.¹⁰²

Parker and the Antimissionists believed that humans should not only believe in God, but use their labor and money to bring glory to God. As a result, they had no interest in a life characterized by massive markets and abundant wealth. Instead, they

¹⁰² Daniel Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 274-75.

sought a life which consisted of enjoying the fruits of their own labor in a simple, dedicated, local manner. It should come as no surprise then that thousands of people joined the Antimission Movement throughout the West and South. When missionaries brought foreign concepts of labor, wealth, and society to the frontier, these ideas simply did not comport with the values of most Christians on the frontier. Rather than embracing these new values, Antimissionists fought back in the most direct way they could – fighting the missions societies.

So, before labeling the missions conflict as a smokescreen of sectional resentment or merely as western jealousy of eastern wealth, as many contemporaries and historians alike have done, one must honestly examine the economic beliefs of the Antimissionists. These people had complex beliefs about labor, money, and the broader market culture. They developed these beliefs through decades of American experience, which had consistently placed the western farmer against the eastern merchant. This cumulative experience, which every yeoman in the early Republic shared, included one economic controversy after another. The debt controversies of Shays' rebellion, the Bank War during the presidency of Andrew Jackson, the Panics of 1819 and 1837, and the upheaval of the Market Revolution represent just a few of the most outstanding. Yet each event carried with it vast economic implications, including the constant division of the country into interest groups, which tended to correspond to geographical regions. And whether the controversy pitted the yeoman farmer against merchant, banker, aristocrat, or missionary, the westerner or southerner always seemed to discover that his incidental enemy came from the Northeast.

Throughout the antebellum period, the burgeoning industry and market of the East caused its population to develop new beliefs about the proper place of labor and money. At the same time, tens of thousands of easterners began inundating the West with these ideas and practices through migration, economic expansion, and a barrage of reform societies. The Antimissionists may not have had the ability to stand up against all of the expanding markets and reform plans of the East, but they could confront the personification of those enemies right in front of them: the missionaries. More than any other reform organization, missions societies were by nature, meant to expand. This sent up a red flag to the people into whose region these men traveled, preached, and settled. In defense of their way of life, Antimissionists felt they had no choice but to fight.

If labor or money had arisen as the only points of contention between mission societies and their opponents, a compromise would have had a fighting chance. If the war had simply pitted rich against poor, someone could have shifted resources around in order to quell the fighting. But this conflict was not so simple. This controversy was about a clash of two entirely different economic cultures. Antimissionists feared that missionaries had brought their lazy, rich, and aggressive market culture from the East with the intent of dismantling the hardworking and frugal culture of the western yeoman. For Parker, the time had come for true Christians to stand against the reform societies which had swept over society as a “current of iniquity.” As the primary representatives of this current, missionaries would bear the brunt of frontier discontent.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 7 (Apr. 1831): 154.

Antimissionists and Labor

In 1860, D.R. Hundley claimed that of all those who “labor on in secret and unobserved...[who] earn an honest livelihood (not by the tricks of trade and the lying spirit...) by the toilsome sweat of their own brows...in all free lands the Yeomen are most deserving of our esteem.” Admittedly, with his lofty praises, Hundley painted a romantic picture of the common yeoman laborer. Nevertheless, in describing their beliefs about labor and livelihood, he painted rather accurately.¹⁰⁴

Parker, Taylor, and the majority of their followers considered themselves to be common farming folk who worked hard and lived simple, honest lives. Most American farmers since the first European settlers set foot on American soil would have considered themselves the same. These yeoman values were passed down through generations, but they did not gain widespread attention or codification until the mid-eighteenth century writings of John Locke. According to Locke:

Every man has a *property* in his own *person*: this no body has any right to but himself. The *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *property*...for it is labour indeed that *puts the difference of value* on every thing.”¹⁰⁵

Although most yeoman of the West and South probably never read Locke, the dissemination of his theories of labor and value throughout American society at the time is undeniable. The Antimission Movement is no exception. Daniel Parker did not enjoy

¹⁰⁴ D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (New York: Henry B. Price, 1860; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973), 192 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹⁰⁵ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. with an introduction by C.B. Macpherson (1690; reprint, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 19, 25 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

a liberal arts college education. He boasted, “I have never examined the English Grammar five minutes, neither do I understand even one rule in the Arithmetic.” Presumably, he never read John Locke. Yet, he believed that the labor he put into his own land, with his own hands, infused his life and work with value. On the other hand, John Leland, an Antimissionist leader in the East, read Locke so often that he could quote him verbatim. Whether by reading Locke directly, or by absorbing his ideas from the yeoman culture around them, Antimissionists had developed theories of labor.¹⁰⁶

This understanding of labor permeated all forms of yeoman activity, not just farming. One of the most popular, yet overlooked forms of yeoman labor consisted in raising livestock. In the antebellum South, almost every family kept some form of livestock, usually in the form of hogs. Planters dabbled in the business, while some farmers raised them to supplement and stabilize their incomes. Many yeoman worked solely as drovers who made their entire year’s profit from herding livestock to market a few times a year. Frederick Law Olmsted met many such men on his antebellum travels throughout the West and South. In Texas, one man told him that he chose to herd hogs simply because he “did not fancy taking care of a plantation.” Taking care of a plantation all year “was too much trouble.” This young man had a clear understanding of the type of life he wanted to lead – a simple and local one which “did not take much

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831): 259; Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 130, 137. Steven Hahn echoes the fact that even backcountry yeomen had an acute understanding of labor theory, whether it came directly from Locke or not. He writes that yeomen “expressed a certain labor theory of value – a notion that the worth of goods was determined by the effort required to produce them,” in *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 73.

to supply [him] with all [he] wanted.” So rather than putting in extensive amounts of labor year round in order to produce more wealth, he preferred to “work hard” only “about a month in the year.” He understood the costs of the type of life he had chosen and labored accordingly.¹⁰⁷

Farmers whose main occupation remained in planting and producing crops understood and took pride in their labor as well. Frank Owsley, in *Plain Folk of the Old South* explored the life of John Davidson, a Tennessee farmer who “labored...lovingly” for his land all his life. He did not have to be a plantation owner or college graduate to appreciate a job well done, nor did he “regard labor in the fields as degrading.” He proudly worked his land and earned his living without acquiring it “by force or craft, fraud or fortune out of the earnings of others.” His livelihood consisted of simple, honest investment, with an equally simple and honest profit.¹⁰⁸

With the pervasiveness of these beliefs regarding labor on the frontier, it should come as no surprise that the yeomen involved with the Antimission Movement believed the same. From northern Illinois to Piney Woods Georgia, yeoman ministers made a living as “preacher-farmers who worked their own land.”¹⁰⁹ Parker described his circumstances and “labour for the support of...[his] family” in detail:

¹⁰⁷ Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, “The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 41 (May 1975), 147-155; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas, or a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier*, foreword by Larry McMurtry (New York: Dix, Edwards, 1857; reprint, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 101 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹⁰⁸ Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949), 17-19.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Wetherington, *Plain Folk's Fight: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Piney Woods Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 36.

A few remarks on my temporal concerns...I got a little spot of poor land...having no improvement on it. I laboured hard when at home, often at night, to get time to preach in the day, my calls to preach being extensive, and the weight on my mind great. Though I believed it right that the Lord's ministers should receive help in their temporal concerns, yet I felt so unworthy to be counted one of them, that I discouraged my brethren in attempting to help me...Farming was my only way to make a support.¹¹⁰

Parker believed that both his physical and spiritual labors required his utmost attention and time. With these labors so intertwined in his daily life, he could not do otherwise.

Religious yeomen maintained an amalgamation of labor and belief – Locke and the Bible – in their thinking and actions. Historian E.P. Thompson has spoken of this sort of meld as a “moral economy.” He rightly claims that in most crowd actions, whether riots or protests, people had “some legitimizing notion” which justified their actions in *moral* terms, not economic terms. Farmers did not oppose economic practices for thoughtless, reactionary reasons, but rather for highly organized, informed, and even religious reasons. For the zealous participants in the Antimission Movement, this principle holds true. Labor was not simply a means to an end or something that had to be done in order to gain wealth or notoriety. Instead, they connected their beliefs about labor and economics with their deep-seated *religious* beliefs. These religious beliefs “elevated their work to a calling,” something far more meaningful than a mere job. When that calling was threatened, Antimissionists vigorously defended it against perceived invaders.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Daniel Parker, “A Public Address to the Baptist Society and Friends of Religion in General on the Principle and Practice of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions or the United States of America” (Stout & Osborn, 1820), 42; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 274-75.

¹¹¹ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (New York: New Press, 1991); 187-89. For a similar discussion of crowd action and the moral economy of farmers in early American history, see Edward

This principle of religiously valuing labor rang especially true for people like Parker and his cohorts. They embraced a form of Reformed theology that had historically esteemed commonplace activities like hands-on labor. With a framework like this, which embraced all kinds of work as callings from God, Antimissionists never parceled different types of labor into separate categories. Parker explained it in this way:

I felt it my duty to go and preach, and also that it was incumbent on me to support my family, and being confident that two duties never came in the way of each other, the great question with me, was, how shall I know when it is my duty to go and preach, and when it was my duty to stay at home and work.”¹¹²

The two duties which Parker recognized as his callings – supporting his family and preaching the Gospel – never superseded one another, because he viewed them both as equal callings on his time and labor. Tens of thousands of people shared these views on labor and chose to rally around religious leaders such as Daniel Parker, Alexander Campbell, and John Taylor. This does not, however, necessarily mean that the entire movement represented a simple matter of economic cause and effect. They united, because of their religious *and* economic beliefs, not because of economics alone.¹¹³

Countryman, *The American Revolution*, revised ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 67-97; T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 218-219.

¹¹² *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12, (Sept. 1831): 275.

¹¹³ I owe the beginnings of this idea to Bertram Wyatt-Brown's review of Paul Johnson's *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, "The Mission and the Masses: The Moral Imperatives of the City Bourgeoisie," *Reviews of American History*, 7 (Dec. 1979), 534. Although he agreed with many of Johnson's descriptions of revivalists, he also believed that Johnson fell short in defining the wildfire revival culture as basically "a sequence of economic cause and effect." Instead, Wyatt-Brown pointed out that religious people may have common economic principles which are not necessarily the foundation for their coming together.

Missionary “Labor”

Above, I place *labor* in quotation marks, because according to the Antimissionists’ view of what true labor looked like, missionaries practiced something far from it. While thousands of yeomen faithfully labored at their own tasks, Parker steamed, “almost every town and settlement are now visited by a self-important young man, who is advocating some of the mission plans, so as to get his living without labouring in the honest way.” The critics of missionary “labor” never tired. In Missouri, citizens referred to missionaries as “mercenaries,” “hirelings,” and “money-made preachers.” In Illinois, Parker referred to them as false men who “do not labour one day in a year, yet possess great wealth.” As far south as Georgia and Florida, Baptist associations commented, “it is not uncommon for professional men of learning [such as missionaries] to expect a living from the sweat of the laboring men.” John Taylor accused them of knowing nothing about “equality of labour” and having “but little knowledge of the worth of property.” In short, Antimissionists believed that the missionaries knew nothing about real labor, and therefore, knew nothing about real property either.¹¹⁴

Considering that Antimissionists constantly felt like they were on the defensive, it is not surprising that they exaggerated their claims and criticisms at times. Missionaries, contrary to popular antimissionist opinion, did not tour the country as

¹¹⁴ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831): 247-48.; Quoted in B.H. Carroll, *The Genesis of American Anti-Missionism* (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1902), 173; Parker, *A Public Address*, 58; Quoted in John G. Crowley, *Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South: 1815 to the Present* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 75; John Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, (Franklin County, KY, 1820), 8, 24.

performing charlatans. Neither did they solicit money to fill their coat pockets while secretly holding immense amounts of wealth in their back pockets. Many traveled tirelessly, preached endlessly, cared deeply, and often ended up supporting themselves when funding failed to materialize. In 1839, one minister in Illinois claimed that many missionaries had trying times attempting to direct the focus of the local people onto spiritual or eternal matters. Few failed for lack of trying. Instead, because they had to spend too much time seeking “temporal” items like “bread to eat and clothes to wear” just to remain alive and well, the time they had for ministry was significantly abbreviated. Like many missionaries, these men believed they were living honest, hard-working, religious lifestyles and that Antimissionists were simply reacting out of spite. What most missionaries did not understand was that the Antimissionists had the deeply-seeded principles of a moral economy in mind. What missionaries viewed as labor, Antimissionists called laziness. Missionaries always tried to legitimize their requests for financial contributions; Antimissionists just called it begging.¹¹⁵

John Taylor spared no words in his lashing of missionary travel, or as he called it, a “begging tour.” Since “their hands are too delicate either to make tents, or pick up a bundle of sticks, to make a fire to warm themselves as Paul did,” Taylor fumed, missionaries resorted to becoming “shameless beggars.” If the Apostle Paul continually labored with his own hands in order to provide for his own needs, how could missionaries dare to do otherwise? Rather than suffer the reproach of a begging

¹¹⁵ This information comes from a letter written on November 26, 1839 by David Smith, a Congregational minister in Illinois. Quoted in William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1850: Vol. III: The Congregationalists* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), 190.

reputation such as this, Parker often refused monetary support for his preaching. As a result, his family had so little money at times that it “really appeared as if [his] family must suffer.” The missionaries, apparently, would rather beg than righteously suffer.¹¹⁶

Even when Parker admitted his vice of being “too proud to beg,” he based his opposition to missionary begging tours on Biblical, logical principles. “We must say,” he exclaimed, “that wherever a preacher labors, is the place for him to claim his support, and he has no scriptural authority to look any where else.” This meant that each pastor, regardless of whether he traveled or not, should have a central home congregation to whom he looked for financial support. Although the missionaries argued otherwise, Antimissionists in much of the South and West clung to this belief. It should come as no surprise then that in the 1850s, Olmsted cited a newspaper which reported two individual churches in urban New York City as contributing more to the Board of Foreign Missions than the entire synods of Virginia and North Carolina combined. John Mason Peck provided Antimissionists with a perfect example of improper money practices in his accepting of funds from more than five reform societies at one time. None of these societies were local, biblically-recognized bodies. Peck could not have made it any easier for Parker and his comrades to cry “Conspiracy!”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 24, 16; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 275.

¹¹⁷ Parker, “A Public Address,” 42. Olmsted’s citation comes from the *Richmond Central Herald*, which listed the combined contributions of the Synods of Virginia and North Carolina to the Board of Foreign Missions in the 1850s as \$8476.55 and the combined contributions of First Church and Fifth Avenue and Nineteenth Street Church in New York as \$14,035.34. In Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country*, introduction by Clement Eaton (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860. Reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 428 (page citations are to the reprint edition); Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, 270.

Missionaries received money in return for their work, and that money did not come from local sources. Therefore, Antimissionists believed they represented foreign, sinful interests. If yeomen despised commercial banking for “divorcing wealth from productive labor,” then their disgust with supposedly Christian mission societies dividing the two would have been exponentially worse. Thus by choosing these forms of labor and payment, missionaries forfeited the right to call themselves true laborers or to ask for monetary support.¹¹⁸

Missionary Behavior

Antimissionists consistently expressed their resentment not only of missionaries’ labor, but the manner in which they practiced it. The Baptist Home Mission Society claimed that they designed all their efforts in order “to encourage...local efforts...and not in the least degree to interfere with or disturb them.” Rather than attempting to “supersede or to embarrass” locals, they professed a desire to work humbly alongside them. How the missionaries truly behaved, we can never fully know. But if we believe the testimonies of local Christians, it looked nothing like the societies’ official statements.¹¹⁹

Missionaries claimed to be considerate and helpful, but Antimissionists often viewed them as the opposite: rude and meddlesome. In place of passive assistance, the missionaries often practiced aggressive tactics to spread their message. One man told John Taylor that he wanted to help his neighbors form a local church but would not

¹¹⁸ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 103.

¹¹⁹ “First Anniversary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society,” proceedings of the convention (New York: A.B.H.M.S., 1832), 8, 10.

proceed, because “the Missionaries will force themselves upon us.” Whether by incessant preaching or shameless flattery, Taylor caustically remarked, missionaries always tried to get their way. Even when local residents wanted to form new congregations or call new preachers, missionaries always attempted to interject their own rules. If forming a local congregation meant having to put up with pugnacious preachers like this, locals wanted nothing to do with it.¹²⁰

In addition to behaving rudely and forcefully, missionaries often exhibited what appeared like blatant pride and arrogance to the Antimissionists. Taylor lashed out at missionaries like Luther Rice for always aiming “to take care of Number One.” It was common for visitors from the East to consider themselves superior to those in the West. Henry Schoolcraft, a nineteenth-century American geographer, traveled throughout the interior of Missouri and Arkansas from 1818 to 1819 and scorned the people as living “beyond the pale of the civilized world,” unable to even speak without an “abundance of the most tedious, trifling, and fatiguing particulars, communicated in bad grammar [and] wretchedly pronounced.” Olmsted expressed similar contempt for backcountry ways in all of his travel narratives. Such arrogant language cut Antimissionists deeper when it came from missionaries, men who claimed to be their loving ministers. For example, Peck described many of those to whom he ministered in Illinois as “illiterate” people who “make utter confusion of the word of God.” If Westerners resented the intellectual

¹²⁰ Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 15, 2.

contempt of secular Easterners like Schoolcraft, they most certainly resented the condescending remarks of missionaries, self-professed brethren in the Church.¹²¹

Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown believed that “the policies and attitudes of the missionaries only served to augment the rancor of the unenlightened elements in southern society;” his analysis was only partially correct. It is absolutely true that missionaries’ policies and attitudes augmented western resistance, but it was not because those resisting were “unenlightened.” Although eastern missionaries may have labeled them as unenlightened, Antimissionists opposed them for the opposite reason: they were completely enlightened. They knew exactly what they believed about labor and the manner in which it should be done. The missionaries fit none of their expectations. What’s more, they did not seem to fit the Biblical mold either. In fact, Parker lamented that when observing “their appearance and conduct, we scarcely can tell them from the lawyers – and common professors are hardly known from the world.” Antimissionists would launch similar criticisms of the way missionaries handled money.¹²²

Missionaries and Money

In 1831, the American Baptist Home Missionary Society formed. At their first anniversary Meeting in 1832, after stating their first two plans – to disseminate information into the Mississippi Valley and to stir up interest in advancing the Baptist

¹²¹ Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 20; Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas* (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1821), 30, 64; John Mason Peck, *A Gazetteer of Illinois*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Grigg & Elliot, 1837), 75.

¹²² Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 36 (Nov. 1970), 517; Parker, “A Public Address,” 62.

cause throughout the nation – they promised, “The grand purpose of our organization should be steadily regarded, – *the preaching of the gospel to every creature in our country.*” Antimissionists would have agreed heartily up to this point, but their suspicions would have immediately arisen at the mention of the next statement: “*A large amount of Funds is obviously needed,* among the indispensable means of our enterprise.” In order to gain these funds, the Society would have to solicit state conventions and auxiliary societies, employ more agents, ask local pastors to serve the Society by volunteering their time and by soliciting money from their own congregations. To Antimissionists, everything about this plan to raise money seemed suspicious, even iniquitous.¹²³

Antimissionist leaders, however, never opposed money or fundraising uncritically. Money was the *root* of all evil, not evil itself. Neither did they reject the practice of paying ministers for their services. In fact, they believed that ministers, like all people, deserved payment for their services. Although Parker rarely accepted payment for preaching, he always believed that he was entitled to it: “When I travel and preach, I have a right to claim my support, and that I am not in debt to the people for the reasonable supplies to enable me to go on in the ministry...[The] Scriptures are too plain to admit of a doubt on that subject.” Fellow Antimissionist Alexander Campbell echoed

¹²³ “First Anniversary,” 6-7. I am not arguing that the missionaries plans were, in fact, as suspicious or iniquitous as the Antimissionists claimed. In fact, I believe that their religious intentions were probably just as genuine as those of their opponents, and just as misunderstood. Just as the Antimissionists held to a worldview which caused them to reject the missions societies, so missionaries subscribed to worldviews which caused them to desire such societies. For an excellent discussion about understanding the significance of reformers’ worldviews to their work, see Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), especially the Preface, vii-ix.

this belief, stating that a minister had every right “to receive such earthly things as he *needs* from those to whose education and comfort he contributes by his labors.”¹²⁴

When antissionist leaders did request financial assistance, however, they often had a difficult time convincing some of their people to give. Not only did frontier yeomen perpetually lack hard currency, but they remained suspicious of travelers and outsiders asking for money. From the beginning of his ministry, Parker knew that making a living as a preacher on the frontier placed him in a precarious position with his congregations regarding money. In 1831, he expressed his frustration:

Though I believed it right that the Lord’s ministers should receive help in their temporal concerns, yet I felt so unworthy to be counted one of them, that I discouraged my brethren in attempting to help me. (In this I have thought I did wrong, and I find it not a hard thing to stop the Baptists from doing their duty to their preachers.)¹²⁵

Parker’s predicament constantly weighed on him. If he chose to labor enough as a farmer to support his family, he might be accused of neglecting his ministerial duties. On the other hand, if he requested money or some other form of support in return for his ministerial services, he probably would not receive enough. In addition, just by asking, he risked hearing the same accusations which were launched at the missionaries for their preaching only for pay. Often, Parker received so little compensation that he feared “his family [was] falling below the common grade of the brethren,” and that as a result, “the devil [would get] the advantage of him.” Still, he continued to preach “the gospel

¹²⁴ Parker, “A Public Address,” 42; *Church Advocate*, vol. II., no. 2 (Nov. 1830): 40; Alexander Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, vol. 1, no. 11 (June 1824): 221.

¹²⁵ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 274-75.

without charge,” all the while believing that Christians should consider it a duty to support ministers, especially those whom they requested.¹²⁶

Since Antimissionists clearly believed that ministers deserved payment for their service, it will not suffice to say that they opposed missionaries’ practice of asking for monetary contributions. The true rallying point against missionaries’ monetary beliefs and practice instead had similarities to the reasons Antimissionists rejected their beliefs and practice regarding labor. The problem lay not in the fact that the missionaries took money and used it, but that they did so in unacceptable, unbiblical ways.

Rather than garnering voluntary support solely from local congregations, most missionaries received anonymous funding from distant societies. Many of these reform and missions societies had no affiliation with any one denomination, much less any particular congregation. Wherever the money came from, many missionaries used it to maintain a stable income. Several made out very well. Missionary to the West Flavel Bascom confessed in an 1833 letter that about 7/8 of his income came from the American Home Missionary Society. Taylor observed several missionaries like Bascom who “could hardly earn bread before,” but upon receiving “collections for missions [were] all doing great!” One reason for their financial comfort, Taylor believed, was that many missionaries took advantage of the distance between them and their supporters by exaggerating their successes and furthering the belief that no Christians existed in the West. By making “greater noise about their progress,” Parker asserted, missionaries hoped to prod Eastern Christians into giving more money. If they had been raising the

¹²⁶ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 12 (Sept. 1830): 276.

majority of the money from the local people to whom they ministered, they would not have fared so well. Regardless of exactly where the money came from, the Antimissionists claimed that having come from anywhere but the local people to whom the missionaries ministered violated New Testament principles regarding the collection and donation of money. Rather than teaching missionaries to look to God for their sustenance, the societies taught them to “look back” like Lot’s wife.¹²⁷

When Antimissionists discovered that some of the missions societies often solicited money from non-Christians, their fury grew exponentially. Not only were missionaries engaging in false labor and receiving money not due them, but that money was tainted. Several societies admitted these actions, although reservedly. One claimed, “The aid which is rendered to these charities is *almost altogether* by the professed disciples of Christ – except in a few cases, where these friendly to his cause, but not professors, contribute a small amount in its behalf – and this is small, indeed.” In 1831, Presbyterian participants in missions societies began to “provide by the appointment of Agents to solicit funds in different parts of the country, & *by other means*.” Missionary societies used the term “other means” loosely, because they did everything from soliciting door-to-door, to petitioning the United States government for support, even if it meant going into debt. Of course, Western farmers knew a little about Eastern debt and creditors. They had experienced the tumultuous days of the Market Revolution and the Panic of 1819, and they wanted nothing more to do with it. Yet no matter where

¹²⁷ Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 13; *Church Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 10 (July 1830): 227. Sweet, *The Congregationalists*, 250; *Thoughts on Missions*, 5; Parker, “A Public Address,” 41.

Antimissionists turned, they felt that they could not get away. Missionaries all around them, “without a word about religion,” continually showed a “manifest thirst to get a little money” in return for their services.¹²⁸

Taylor threw subtlety to the wind in his critiques of this type of money-hungry missionary. In his caustic *Thoughts on Missions*, he focused his attack on two missionaries: Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice. Adoniram Judson had traveled around the world as a missionary, and much of America considered him as nothing less than an international hero; Taylor disagreed. “If we attend to the long, celebrated letter of Mrs. Judson,” he attacked, “it would look as if her husband has the same taste for money that the horse leech has for blood.” With this remark, Taylor placed himself on the reading lists of missionaries and Antimissionists across the nation. He had injected into the national debate the metaphor of the horse leech, constantly using it to describe the missionaries’ constant begging for money, “ever crying, *give, give!!*” Within a few years, Antimissionists in Mississippi were calling the missionaries “bloodsuckers after money.” In 1825, Antimissionists in a North Carolina Baptist society refashioned the metaphor by calling missionaries “hungry mosquitoes [which would] suck your money if possible.” Throughout the controversy, Antimissionists throughout the country blasted missionaries for their insatiable appetite for more money.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ R.B.C. Lowell, ed., *The Baptist*, vol. I, no. 6 (June 1835): 84, emphasis added; Sweet, *The Presbyterians*, 654, emphasis added. In 1824, a college founded by the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions requested a loan from the United States Congress. Parker records details of this incident in both *The Authors Defence*, 13-16, and in the *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 1 (Oct. 1830): 12; Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 32.

¹²⁹ Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 6, 12; Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, 334-35.

Taylor had an equally low opinion of American missionary extraordinaire, Luther Rice. According to Taylor, Rice loved money so much, that he probably “would not be willing to catch men in the sense the Saviour designed” but would gladly “catch a fish (as Peter did) with a piece of money in its mouth.”¹³⁰ A frontier preacher all his life, Taylor despised men like Rice, men who appeared faithful to God and the people, yet truly lived for money and fame:

“Though I admired the art of this well taught Yankee, yet I considered him a modern Tetzal, and that the Pope’s old orator of that name was equally innocent with Luther Rice, and his motive about the same. He was to get money by the sale of indulgences for the use of the Pope and Church. Luther’s motive was thro’ sophistry and Yankee art, to get money for the Mission...[His] measures of cunning in the same art of Tetzal, may alarm all the American Baptists.”¹³¹

Taylor may have been impressed by Rice, but in the end, he considered him a popish traitor. Like the infamous Tetzal of the Catholic Church, missionaries appeared to Antimissionists as greedy horse leeches who sought to “rake the world for money,” whatever the cost.¹³²

While missionaries apparently raked in plenty of money, Parker and thousands of Western yeomen often barely scraped by. Throughout *The Church Advocate* from 1829-31, Parker lamented that he would probably have to cease publishing due to lack of funds. This proved even more frustrating when he saw enemies such as Peck who seemed to have unlimited “funds to support them.” With the Panic of 1819 fresh on their memories and the Panic of 1837 on their doorstep, Antimissionists remained wary

¹³⁰ Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 21.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 24.

of the economic climate around them. Even missionaries who may have previously looked like honest Christians sure looked like horse leeches now. Parker refused to give in to their “blood-sucking” fundraising tactics. Instead, he chose to remain “alone dependant on the Lord to open the way for the progress and success of his truth through me his earthen instrument.” If it failed, Parker would at least know that God approved of how he used his money.¹³³

It was not that all Antimissionists were poor, and thus despised all rich people from the East. On the contrary, among the tens of thousands of Antimissionists, many lived comfortable and successful lives. “With very frequent rains” in 1829-30, one supporter of Parker wrote a letter to the editor claiming that “health, crops, and markets are very good.” As already mentioned, John Taylor obtained a substantial amount of wealth by the end of his life, in both land and slaves. Historian Byron Cecil Lambert even concluded that although some Antimissionists, like Parker, experienced hard times, some of them “tended to be more independent financially than those who supported missions.” Although issues regarding wealth pervaded the controversy, they clearly cannot explain why people chose sides.¹³⁴

Even if the roles had been reversed, making every missionary a poor farmer and every anti-missionary a rich businessman, the conflict would have continued on the basis of principles. Beliefs and behavior, not dollars, were the primary issues.

¹³³ Daniel Parker, *The Authors' Defence, by Explanations and Matters of Fact. Remarks on Discipline, and Reflections on the Church Christ with the Utility and Benefits of Associations* (E. Stout, 1824), 11.

¹³⁴ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 9 (June 1830): 193; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 5 (Feb. 1830): 103; Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, 401-02.

Antimissionists hated mission societies and their money not because they had money, but because they obtained and used it wrongly. In 1832, at a meeting in Black Rock, Maryland, Antimissionists asserted that the primary problem with mission societies' monetary policies was that "money is the *principal* consideration" in all decisions. "A certain sum entitles to membership, a larger sum to life membership, a still larger to directorship, etc., so that their constitutions, contrary to the direction of James, are partial, saying to the rich man, sit thou here, and to the poor, stand thou here." By making money the sole means for gaining membership, missions societies automatically excluded poor people and congregations which had little money to give. By further making money the only way to attain a position of leadership, societies testified that although religion and character mattered, money mattered more. Against basic biblical and democratic principles, missionaries gave a disproportionate amount of attention to wealth and used it to unfairly privilege some people over others. According to Antimissionists, money had become the missionaries' master rather than their servant.¹³⁵

Antimissionists lived with the fear of financial takeover by greedy and false religious leaders. They had many concrete reasons for this fear. After all, the Triennial Convention not only organized and labored unbiblically, but they set up their entire structure and representation according to the amount of money a person or group contributed. In a western climate of ever-increasing suspicion of the market, "What clearer proof was needed to show that the mission system was an eastern financial

¹³⁵ "Black Rock Address," quoted in Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, 369, emphasis added.

instrument,” bent on completely overhauling the economic lives of citizens of the West?¹³⁶ Antimissionists needed no further proof, but they found more nonetheless.

Missionaries and the Market

Antimissionists’ opposition to specific economic practices of missionaries was symptomatic of their much broader rejection of the eastern market culture which the missions societies represented. Many historians have tended to describe antebellum evangelicals’ relation to the boom of the Market Revolution in one of two ways. Some claim that evangelicals, particularly those in rural areas, completely rejected market society and everything associated with it. William Warren Sweet believed that most of the people involved in the Antimission Movement came from backgrounds “where the people were out of touch with the usual cultural influences,” and thus naturally opposed them. Most rural yeomen did live “out of touch” with the culture, in the sense that they did not daily encounter businessmen and entrepreneurs in the corn fields. However, they still familiarized themselves with the market enough to understand and participate in it.¹³⁷

Far from remaining ignorant or simply rejecting it, antebellum yeomen used the emerging market culture to their own advantage. In the antebellum Georgia Upcountry, yeoman preferred to remain local with their labor and money, yet they made use of the broader national market on occasion by selling surplus staple crops for profit. In choosing when and how they used the national market, yeoman could make sure that it

¹³⁶ Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, 147-48.

¹³⁷ William Warren Sweet, ed., *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830*, introduction by Shirley Jackson Case (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 67.

“served their interests rather than dominated their lives.” Yeomen in South Carolina practiced the same federalist style of market participation. They preferred the local “general store culture” in which they could slowly build their own finances and maintain their independence. Still, when it served their interests, they invested in staple crops for wider market consumption and profit. Throughout the West and South, yeomen knew and used the market when they wanted, how they wanted, and on their own terms.¹³⁸

A second group of historians has tended to view the market as something which evangelicals, rather than rejecting, actually embraced completely. These historians further claim that many religious leaders so adamantly desired the wealth and power which the burgeoning market society had to offer, that they used their professed religion only as a spiritual means toward economic and political ends. Yet, as Mark Noll noted, modern historians who “interpret economic relations as primary and all other relations [like religion] as secondary are misleading.”¹³⁹ For example, Paul Johnson writes in *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*:

Evangelicalism was a middle-class solution to problems of class, legitimacy, and order generated in the early stages of manufacturing. Revivals provided entrepreneurs with a means of imposing new standards of work discipline and personal comportment upon themselves and the men who worked for them, and thus they functioned as powerful social controls.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 38-39; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 61-66, 96-104. Mark Wetherington’s more recent work on yeomen in Piney Woods Georgia points to the same idea – that yeomen embraced the market, but on their own terms. He also discusses how intermarriage between yeomen and planter classes enhanced this participation in several economic circles, in Wetherington, *Plain Folk’s Fight*, 4-5.

¹³⁹ Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edward to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 221.

¹⁴⁰ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*, 2nd Edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 138. Important studies which conclude the contrary include Noll’s *America’s God*, Robert Abzug’s *Cosmos Crumbling*, Nathan Hatch’s *The*

I will not argue against the idea that revivals or religious leadership roles provide people with opportunities for more than spiritual activity. Often, as with the Antimission Movement, economic aims and axes to grind coincide with religious controversy. However, it is more intellectually responsible to accept that religious people actually believed what they professed, before assuming that their beliefs served only as tools to “work their economic wills.”¹⁴¹

Rather than totally rejecting or wholly embracing the market and its ways, evangelicals considered its compatibility with their beliefs and used it accordingly. Antimissionists did not wholly oppose the market itself. They stood against the missionaries’ immersion into the *ways* of the secular market, because it made them indistinguishable from the secular culture. While missionaries and their societies mingled loosely with the ways of the world, Antimissionists tended to regard the market with much more suspicion. For them, the market was meant to serve merely as an instrument for benevolence. Instead, missions societies had let it become the metronome by which they set their structure, policies, and goals. Rather than honoring local economic customs, missionaries seemed to build their entire economic worldviews upon the ebb and flow of the national market. Rather than delivering the Gospel freely, missions societies seemed more interested in selling it, like merchandise. Consequently,

Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), and Lois Banner’s “Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation,” *The Journal of American History*, 60 (June 1973), 23-41.

¹⁴¹ Noll, *America’s God*, 221. This principle rings especially true for the Antimissionists for two reasons: first, because they had relatively little money, power, or social control to protect in the first place, and secondly, because they were *responding* to reform strategies rather than creating them. It would be difficult to argue that such a group had social control in mind when their entire movement was, in essence, a response to another group’s attempt at control.

otherwise market-friendly Christians viewed many missionaries not as beneficent visitors, but as invading, manufactured merchants.¹⁴²

Early in the nineteenth century, antimissionist Elias Smith created the “epithet of the ‘manufactured’ Eastern minister,” a phrase Antimissionists commonly used when referring to eastern missionaries. Antimissionists wanted ministers who could spontaneously mount a stump and preach to them in a culturally relevant manner, not a lecturer with long, formulaic sermons. Instead, they received “home-manufactured” preachers whose “fuel was money,” who were made in “preaching manufactories.” And lest anyone accuse him of blind sectional prejudice, Parker declared that he would accept neither “the eastern nor western” man-made preacher. Regardless of the place of manufacture, Antimissionists rejected a product meant for religious purposes that had been made with secular parts.¹⁴³

Because of the manner in which “manufactured” missionaries spread their message, Antimissionists labeled them as “hucksters” who discredited and tainted the faith by “making merchandise” of the Gospel. The obvious indicting evidence for this charge lay in the fact that missionaries constantly sold items for profit. Taylor witnessed Rice selling pictures of missionaries (even of himself), and Parker accused Peck of the

¹⁴² Several historians have done an excellent job of fleshing out this idea in regard to the time of the First Great Awakening. For example, see Frank Lambert, *“Pedlar in Divinity”: George Whitfield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Lambert discusses Whitfield not as an entrepreneur who used religion as a means to succeed economically, but as a both a dedicated preacher *and* a successful entrepreneur, who was able to do both without compromise or deceit. I aim in this paper to present *both* sides of the conflict in this manner, especially the Antimissionists.

¹⁴³ Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists*, 113, 146; Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 237, 243; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 12 (Sept. 1831): 286; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 1 (Oct. 1830): 14. See similar passages in *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 4 (Jan. 1830): 75 and vol. II, no. 1 (Oct. 1830): 7.

same. Membership in missions societies remained open to the highest bidder. And with the amount of religious paraphernalia floating around, it seemed that “the world [was] almost deluged with periodicals, tracts, and religious newspapers” – all for sale, of course. Missionaries displayed even more sacrilegious audacity by establishing Sunday Schools. Although societies may have maintained good intentions of teaching children, Antimissionists claimed they instead made “merchandize of the gospel by abusing the Sabbath in preaching for money on the Lord’s day.” Parker could find no biblical support for any of these practices. “Truth needs no propping nor dressing,” he claimed, nor did it need the “recommendation and protection of the...human arts.” By using secular marketing methods, missionaries put themselves one step closer to the world, one step further from God.¹⁴⁴

As if using worldly wisdom and marketing for spreading the Gospel was not enough, Antimissionists claimed that missions societies from the East actively employed the ultimate form of market expansion: colonization. Every American of the early republic knew what colonization meant. Many of its abuses had provided the foundation for Americans’ defense of the revolution against Britain: unfair representation, economic exploitation, quartering laws, and geographic limitations represent just a few. Antimissionists’ complaints about missionary colonization followed in this tradition. Just as Britain’s policies toward the thirteen colonies reflected more than a desire for their well being, so Antimissionists believed missionaries had much more than altruism

¹⁴⁴ Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 19, 32; Parker, *The Author’s Defence*, 12; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 10 (July 1831): 226; letter to the editor, in *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 5 (Feb. 1830): 102; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831): 248-49; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 47; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 9 (June 1830): 214.

in mind. Often, missionaries practiced much more than they preached in the West. Missionary men often came alone, but on a regular basis, many also brought their families, possessions, and financial aspirations. Baptist missions societies denied the charges of colonizing, particularly in Native American communities, claiming instead that their mission settlements existed to promote religion. Antimissionists remained skeptical. “It seems like making the sacred character of religion no greater than the merchandize of this world, and putting it in a long line of trade and traffic,” Parker reckoned. As the number of frontier missionaries continually grew, the idea of a colonization grew along with it. “When we look at the plan proposed in the mission system,” Parker suspiciously observed, “we find they are aiming to establish missionary families not only among the heathens, but on our own frontiers...there setting up schools and raising family funds and stocks, flocks and herds...all belonging to the mission system.” It seemed as if missionaries wanted to assist the people they ministered only as a means toward helping them dominate.¹⁴⁵

Overall, it seemed to Antimissionists as if “the influence of Yankee commercial life upon religious philanthropy” had grown to immeasurably large proportions. More than holding to alternate interpretations of labor or money, missions societies in the East seemed to have developed an entirely new and heretical belief about the relationship between God and Mammon. Without surrender from one side or the other, the divide could not be repaired. Even within denominations, congregations held to completely opposite beliefs about the role of Christians in the market and society. The rift between

¹⁴⁵ Parker, “A Public Address,” 13, 46.

missionary and anti-missionary Baptists had grown so wide by 1830 that Parker could remark about his former brethren: “If we were to judge of the Baptists in the eastern or old states, by the few *fleece hunters*, *time servers*, and *men pleasers*, whose motto is GIVE, GIVE, that have come among us from that quarter, it indeed would be very unfavorable.” In Parker’s estimation, missionaries had descended from “brethren” to “horse leeches” in less than two decades.¹⁴⁶

Concluding Thoughts

Most supporters of missions societies never could – or never would – understand the position of their opponents. They continually defined the conflict as sectional or as an ignorant misunderstanding on the part of Antimissionists. In 1837, one missionary to Indiana claimed in his correspondence with the American Home Missionary Society that a group he knew as “Parkerites” exhibited a “general want of intelligence,” which caused them to hinder the progress of revivals. Ten years later, an agent of the same missionary society criticized an increasingly large group of antimissionist Baptists whom he asserted simply “opposed...every institution that costs money.” These testimonies are poor reflections of the professed reasons why throughout the antebellum period, tens of thousands of citizens opposed benevolent activity in the form of missions societies. As I have discussed, Antimissionists and their leaders developed and maintained clear beliefs about economics, which missions societies oftentimes violated by their very existence, not to mention by their operation. The explosion of home

¹⁴⁶ Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement,” 507; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 3 (Dec. 1830): 60.

missions in the East represented more than a distant intellectual challenge to a few secondary principles of yeomen. Much to the contrary, it “cut...deeply into the traditional fabric” of their society, shaking the very foundations of their lives.¹⁴⁷

The story of Robert Matthews, a contemporary of the Antimission Movement, provides a telling insight into the motivations of Antimissionists. In *The Kingdom of Matthias*, Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz tell the story of Matthews, an 1830s journeyman carpenter from New York. After a series of personal trials, he broke from his traditional Christian roots, rejected the revival culture of the Second Great Awakening, proclaimed himself the prophet Matthias, and subsequently gathered a small following. The primary reason Matthews chose to rebel against the revival culture of his day was that he believed it had associated too closely with the spirit of the burgeoning market. This new spirit, he believed, would not only destroy the patriarchal society he held dear, but would trample on everything he believed and practiced.¹⁴⁸

In the same way Matthews believed that his entire way of life was threatened by the advancing revival culture, so the Antimissionists believed that missions societies not only threatened their religion, but their entire conception of Christian character and behavior. The interpretive problem arises, however, when we focus on a group’s loss or lack of things (such as money or social control), and then determine that the primary reason for their fiery opposition to the offender is in order to gain (or regain) these

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Sweet, *The Presbyterians*, 690-691, 697-98; William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 136.

¹⁴⁸ Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); for example, see pp.94-96.

things. In the case of the Antimission Movement (and I would argue, for most religious controversies), this interpretation misses the inescapable fact that the Antimissionists believed and voiced particular rules for labor, money, market, and the interaction of Christians with all three. For them, the controversy was less about regaining or establishing control and more about protecting their fundamental beliefs and way of life. More than being upset about having less power or money (neither of which they had much of in the first place) than their opponents, they believed that missions societies and their agents had violated laws which God had ordained and to which He demanded obedience, regardless of economic class or geographical location.

Thus, even though antebellum missionaries believed they were doing godly works in the burgeoning market society, according to Antimissionists of the day, they sinned against God with each and every one. When they described their service and monetary benevolence as at least having good motives behind them, Parker replied:

King Saul fearing the people more than the Lord, and therefore instead of doing what the Lord commanded, preserved the best of the sheep and oxen to offer unto the Lord. But his zeal and good intentions could not cause the “strength” of Israel to lie or repent – his transgression was unpardonable.¹⁴⁹

No matter how much labor they expended, no matter how much money they raised, no matter how they used it, the missions societies labor remained tainted, an offering, like Saul’s, unfavorable to the Lord.

¹⁴⁹ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 1 (Oct. 1829): 20.

CHAPTER V

THE GOVERNMENT AND AUTHORITY OF CHURCH AND STATE

In 1806, Reverend William Jones began serving as the pastor of the Wood River Church of southwest Illinois. From its founding in 1806, until his death decades later, he was the leading member of the congregation. He preached every Sunday, led church discussions, helped oversee matters of church discipline, acted as a delegate to association meetings, and in 1807, helped organize the first Baptist association in Illinois. His name and decisions are scattered throughout the church's records, indicating that the congregation respected his influence and submitted to it most of the time. However, in October 1820, the Wood River congregation encountered something firsthand which they had not encountered before – the missions system. Pastor Jones independently accepted a one-month, paid position from a missions society. As a result, the people of the congregation promptly reminded their pastor of his limited authority and expressed their thoughts regarding the issue of missions:

2d The Church is not willing for any of her members to have any thing to do with the bord of Western Missions

3^d whereas Br Jones was appointe by the Board as a Missionary for one month the Church is willing he may receive the wages appointed him for the same and then to be cautious to receive no more from the board for like service.¹⁵⁰

Since Jones remains in the records after October 1820, we can assume that he assented to the will of his congregation and promptly distanced himself from the missions system.

¹⁵⁰ Records of the Wood River Church, in *William Warren Sweet*, ed. *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830*, introduction by Shirley Jackson Case (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 261-70.

The Wood River Church represents only one of thousands of groups across the country which saw sin and danger in the missions system. According to Antimissionists, not only did the missions societies pose a threat to the authority of local churches, but they threatened the very idea of republican liberty which America stood upon. Daniel Parker described the missions societies as “at war with the first, and dearest, principles of the christian religion and the republican government.” By opposing these dearest principles, missionaries acted as “a set of wicked rebels against the government of Heaven,” not as the benevolent carriers of good news they proclaimed themselves to be.¹⁵¹

The clash between the missions societies and the Antimissionists may never have become so contentious had their political ideals remained geographically separate. Both sides would have retained their beliefs and principles, but for the most part, neither would have encroached upon the other’s territory and authority. While most reform societies could have maintained this separation, this option was inherently impossible for missions societies. In order for someone to participate in missions to the West, they had to actually travel to the West. Hundreds of missionaries did just that in the early 1800s, and in process, trampled all over the territory and beliefs of the Antimissionists. Daniel Parker warned his readers and their local churches about losing their authority to these missionaries: “The fact is the [missions] spirit [is] now engaged to get the church to lay down her articles of faith.” In other words, Parker believed that the missions societies sought to make local congregations, like Wood River Church, relinquish their authority.

¹⁵¹ Daniel Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 1 (Oct. 1829), 22; vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831): 247.

With such fundamental principles of government and authority on the line, Antimissionists felt they had no choice but to resist, for the sake of their liberties.¹⁵²

Antimissionists' beliefs regarding authority and government, in both the secular and sacred realms, shaped their responses to the perceived threat of missionary societies. They combined both Jacksonian political rhetoric and biblical mandates in an articulated argument against the work and very existence of these societies. They often so seamlessly combined their political and biblical rhetoric that it proves difficult for present-day readers to separate the two. For example, Alexander Campbell referred to his call for the true church to separate itself from the false churches of the day as "a declaration of independence of the kingdom of Jesus" – an undeniable reference to both the New Testament and the Declaration of Independence. In antebellum Christian circles, such rhetoric abounded. Christians on both sides of the missions controversy rooted their beliefs about secular subjects, such as politics, in theological and ecclesiastical beliefs. As historian Robert Abzug explained, reformers and anti-reformers alike "did not abandon the realm of the sacred in championing "social" causes." Rather, they approached their political situations in light of what they believed about the sacred. Therefore, claims that Antimissionists set aside religious conviction and rejected missionary societies for merely political reasons cannot explain the situation properly.¹⁵³

¹⁵² *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 1 (Oct. 1829): 1

¹⁵³ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 186; Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4; Concerning the claim that Antimissionists opposed missions societies for political reasons, separate from religious thought, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The Antimission

Daniel Parker exemplified this religious defense of political issues all his life. He consistently expressed his fear of missions societies proving ruinous not only to his predestinarian Baptist beliefs, but also to his political ideals. He believed that the societies represented the prophetic fulfillment of Revelation's "awful smoke," which had "so much darkened the sun & air in the east, [so as] to reach [the] western hemisphere" and endanger antissionist liberties, "both religious and political."¹⁵⁴ As an independent yeoman farmer in the early republic, Parker considered his liberty one of his most precious privileges. Common men like him believed they had won this privilege fifty years earlier in the American Revolution, and they had no inclination to give it up. Before the Revolution, few common men in America embraced or articulated philosophical ideas regarding human equality, individual liberties, and limited authorities; these discussions and privileges were left to the elite. The Revolution, however, opened the floodgates for such ideas and language to permeate all of society. Common, laboring, backcountry yeomen were no exception. Nathan Hatch assessed the importance of the Revolution to the beliefs of common citizens in this way:

Above all, the Revolution dramatically expanded the circle of people who considered themselves capable of thinking for themselves about issues of freedom, equality, sovereignty, and representation. Respect for authority, tradition, station, and education eroded. Ordinary people moved toward these new horizons aided by a powerful new vocabulary, a rhetoric of liberty that would not have occurred to them were it not for the Revolution.¹⁵⁵

Movement," and T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Both of these historians viewed the Antimission Movement as primarily an exercise in Jacksonian political beliefs. According to them, Antimissionists held political beliefs first, then aligned their religious rhetoric accordingly.

¹⁵⁴ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 1 (Oct. 1829): 22; vol. II, no. 10 (July 1831): 225-26.

¹⁵⁵ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 5-6. For an example of a common yeoman who embraced these ideals as a result of the Revolution, see, Michael Merrill and Sean Wilentz,

Antimissionists utilized the Revolution's enduring legacy of individual liberties in their battle against missions societies. Such beliefs informed and complemented their religious beliefs. However, to protect these liberties, they ultimately referred not to political documents like the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, but to their religious beliefs. "I am determined," Parker proclaimed, "to stand or fall with the rights and authority of the gospel church." In the end, Antimissionists protected their political ideals by building them upon the foundation of religious truth.¹⁵⁶

Jacksonian Democratic Ideals

In the June 1825 issue of his periodical *The Christian Baptist*, Alexander Campbell included a recent story about Andrew Jackson:

General Jackson...arrived at Brownsville, Pa. on Sunday week...[His] arrival was announced by the ringing of bells – and the citizens of the town and surrounding country assembled, *en masse*, to pay their respects to the illustrious hero. After partaking of an excellent public dinner prepared for the occasion...the General and his lady...attended divine service at the Presbyterian church of Rev. Mr. Johnson...[A] citizen of the place whom no person ever suspected of being religious, came under the necessary vows, and had his child "*christened*" in the presence of the General, and named *Andrew Jackson*!¹⁵⁷

Many people west of the Appalachians had begun to embrace Jacksonian ideals even before his election to the presidency in 1828, so much so that they christened their children in his name. What makes this anecdotal story important for the present study is that it was recorded not in an urban newspaper or scholarly journal, but in an avowedly western, religious, Antimission-friendly periodical. Antimissionists of the West,

eds., *The Key of Liberty: The Life and Democratic Writings of William Manning, "A Laborer," 1747-1814* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁵⁶ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 1 (Oct. 1830): 11.

¹⁵⁷ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, vol. II, no. 11 (June 1825): 230.

especially Baptists, had already voiced their religious concerns with the missions societies before Jackson's fame had swept the country. However, as Jackson and his democratic ideals burst onto the political scene in the 1820s, the Antimissionists "found a political outlet" for their deeply religious frustration.¹⁵⁸

As Harry Watson has argued, the political world of the antebellum United States was characterized by a constant struggle between liberty and power. Simply stated, people desired maximum liberty for themselves and limited power for those who held authority. Antimissionists experienced this same struggle in their fight against missions societies. While they desired liberty for themselves and their communities, they viewed missions societies as illegitimate seekers of power not their own. Antimissionists clung to their independence and the Jacksonian ideal of a democratic republic governed by independent white men, regardless of their wealth or status. They perceived those who then attempted to limit this liberty in any way not merely as men with competing interests, but as "enemies of liberty itself." So when missionaries entered the West as emissaries of eastern societies and tried to teach and enforce alien rules and customs, Antimissionists rose to oppose them.¹⁵⁹

The first arena in which the battle for liberty took place was the home. Parker considered individuals as "living souls" who had "the power of action" in dealing with their own lives as they saw fit. With universal white male suffrage as a foundation, antimissionist men claimed authority over their homes and lives, especially against any

¹⁵⁸ Wyatt-Brown, "The Antimission Movement," 511.

¹⁵⁹ Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 47. Chapter 2 was particularly enlightening in regard to both the concepts of liberty and power and the struggle between them.

outside intruder. So when those who became the object of reform societies began to see control over their personal lives undermined, they wholeheartedly rejected the societies. For example, Antimissionists believed that they should observe the Sabbath on Sunday. This meant that as families, they would set aside all activities pertaining to work and instead focus their attention on religious subjects. So, when missionaries like Peck began arriving and setting up Sunday (or Sabbath) schools, Antimissionists avidly opposed them. They certainly disapproved of using the Sabbath as yet another day of secular learning. However, they also oppose them because they regarded them as a disguised attempt to “release parents from their obligations to govern their families on the Lord’s day.” No western yeoman was about to release any of his patriarchal authority, especially on the Sabbath, and especially to an eastern missionary.¹⁶⁰

Men’s practice of guarding their authority within their homes was not unique to the Antimission Movement. During the Second Great Awakening, men from all kinds of backgrounds did the same. Once again, the story of Robert Matthews provides a telling example. Despite the perceived positive effects of the Second Great Awakening revivals of Charles Finney in New York, people like Matthews remained suspicious. While he disagreed with Finney’s theology, he also resented the fact that Finney and other preachers like him “lured young and female spirits out of their houses and into church and prayer meetings.” In these revival and prayer meetings, women had begun to gain positions of prominence which stood outside the purview of their husbands and fathers.

¹⁶⁰ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 27-28; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 11 (Aug. 1831): 248.

Matthews believed that this sort of behavior subverted the authority of white men over their own households and thus endangered the life of the family. To guard against this overturning of family values, he, like the Antimissionists, rejected the revivals and the reform spirit that accompanied them.¹⁶¹

Antimissionists believed in the authority of individual males in the home, but they also believed in the Jacksonian principle of majority rule. This did not mean that the votes of the mother and the children could outweigh the decision of the father. Rather, it meant that Antimissionists believed in the ability of many common men to come together to temper the power of a few elite. Although many common men continued to practice some form of deference to their supposed social betters in the antebellum period, many also pushed the “American political system to its democratic limits” by forcing elites to constantly reckon with their will.¹⁶² They did this by joining together and taking advantage of the expansion of voting rights and political participation in the nation. Antimissionists reflected this trend toward majority will by protesting against churches which joined national missions societies without the expressed support of their people.

¹⁶¹ Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7, 94-96. Stephanie McCurry has provided a wealth of information regarding the authority of men in towns, churches, and households in antebellum America, in *Masters of Small Worlds, Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁶² Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian American, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 332. Mark Wetherington discusses this give-and-take relationship between the yeomen and elite in *Plain Folk's Fight: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Piney Woods Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 46-48, and Steven Hahn does the same in *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 94-95.

Even within individual congregations, people fiercely protected the principle of majority rule. In response to a question of whether Baptists from outside of the local congregation should be allowed to vote on church matters, Parker warned his readers of doing so for fear that “a few individuals may carry their point over the head of a large majority...and thereby govern the union.” If Antimissionists guarded their churches with suspicion against outsiders who lived nearby, they would certainly keep men from a distant section of the country from creeping in uninvited. Under no circumstances did they allow a minority to govern, even if that minority included the pastor or the elders of the church. In the Baptist government of the time, church members believed that everyone in the congregation governed collectively, regardless of their status. In congregational meetings, as exemplified by the aforementioned Wood River Church, ministers and laypersons all had votes with equal power. Since everyone in the church had to answer to everyone else, it logically followed to believe that the “power to govern [did] not belong to any one member,” but to the entire body. Only the traditional enemies of Antimissionist Baptists, the “*Pope*, the *Priest*, and the *Pedo Baptist*,” aristocratically practiced such undemocratic ways.¹⁶³

The Antimission Baptists held tightly to their democratic ideals as best exemplified in the Jacksonian movement and rhetoric. Individuals fiercely guarded their liberty, maintained authority over their own and their families’ lives, and demanded that the majority hold the minority in check, whether in a political or religious context. Yet,

¹⁶³ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 1 (Nov. 1830): 35; vol. I, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 32; vol. II, no. 10 (July 1831): 235. The term “Pedo Baptist” refers to Christian groups who baptize infants.

Jackson above most people recognized that democracy had its proper place under a higher authority. For the nation's government, these higher authorities were the elected national officials, and more importantly, the Constitution. In the religious realm, Antimissionists recognized their own corresponding higher authorities: God and the Bible.

Higher Authorities

Jacksonians cherished the political independence of the individual and the local community, but they also respected the authority of the national government and the Constitution. President Jackson exemplified this dual principle during his first term as president. When the people of the state of Georgia sought the removal of the Cherokee in the early 1830s, Jackson sided with them, spurning the authority of the Supreme Court. At the same time this controversy occurred, however, Jackson decried the right of the people of South Carolina to nullify national tariff laws in 1832. In addition, he spent more on national internal improvements than all of the previous presidential administrations spent combined. Although one may question the morality of his decisions, Jackson's dual principles fit comfortably in a traditional federalist framework. The national government had authority to address truly national issues, but it conceded vast amounts of power to the states regarding local issues.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Richard Ellis masterfully examines Jackson's divided loyalties to both states' rights and federal authority in *The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States' Rights and the Nullification Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Chapters 2 and 3 in particular explain in detail how Jackson ultimately relied on the Constitution for determining his actions in state/federal disagreements.

Those involved in the Antimission Movement congruently recognized a “true republican government” as the basis of their Christian community. According to their biblical interpretations, local congregations had been given the right to exercise authority over the actions of their churches and of the individuals involved in them. At the same time, they clearly understood that when disputes arose within the local or national church, they owed their ultimate allegiance not to their congregation, but to “the King of Zion” and his “Supreme law.” It was not just the articulate leaders of the movement, such as Parker, Taylor, and Campbell who understood this. An anonymous writer expressed in a letter to Alexander Campbell that the “government of KING MESSIAH is an *absolute monarchy*” and that the rules of his kingdom “have become of unalterable record.” So although local law and authority had power in its own sphere of influence, any local laws which aimed to “exceed their bounds” consequently became “null and void” in light of heavenly authority.¹⁶⁵

Antimissionists believed in the right of the national government to hold some power over the states and in the sovereign right of God to rule over all, but they also believed that ideally, these sovereigns would exhibit care, benevolence, and even love for their subjects. Ultimate authority, then, did not necessarily translate into heavy-handedness. For them, God never existed solely to lord his power over humans nor did the Bible exist simply to condemn lawbreakers. Both were meant for blessings as well: God as a provider and the Bible as a guide. Similarly, Antimissionists argued

¹⁶⁵ Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*, vol. III, no. 8 (Sept. 1832): 444; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 28.

vehemently along with Jacksonians that the secular national authorities should exist not only to rule, but to protect the interests of local authorities and individuals. “Security to every man his right...is the supreme law of the nation,” Parker claimed, and this right extended to “every incorporated body, either religious or political.” The supreme law of the nation Parker referred to was the Constitution, and even though that document granted power to the various branches of government, Parker did not consider the delineation of power as its most important function. Rather, echoing the words of the Bill of Rights, he believed that the first function of the Constitution was to secure the rights of individuals to live in peace. All political sovereigns had the right to demand their subjects’ obedience, but the best rulers were those who did so benevolently.¹⁶⁶

In return for this national guard on the watchtower, Antimissionists claimed that individuals should be ready, if called upon, to sacrifice some of their individual liberty for the national good. Necessity might demand a measure of self-denial “in order to secure the greater, or most precious parts” of the union. This inevitably created tension in the lives of frontiersmen who adhered to individual rights, a tension between cultivating virtuous willingness to give up one’s individual liberty while at the same time fighting to protect it. Antimissionists dealt with this tension on a daily basis. On one hand, they “were unionists first, ‘if it be indeed a Union of rights, interest, and honor.’” As long as the state followed true “republican principle,” it would have their allegiance. On the other hand, they always stood ready to protect themselves from such a union that attempted to encroach upon their local rights. Parker explicitly compared these

¹⁶⁶ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 27.

principles to the Antimissionist struggle against missions societies. He believed that missions societies, by incorporating apart from local churches and without specific biblical authority, had wrested authority that belonged only to God. Although they would have preferred to live in a common Christian union with the missionaries, they felt duty-bound to oppose the missionaries' unchristian, unrepublican principles.¹⁶⁷

Understanding Antimissionists' concept of authority, especially that of God, helps to explain why they so avidly opposed the work of missions societies like the Triennial Convention. Western Baptists considered the authority of God total and unchanging in the world, but mission societies tended to use language which made it seem as if they believed God had lost some of his authority. While Antimissionists claimed that humans could do nothing good on their own for God, missionaries seemed to believe that God needed their service to accomplish His plan. In the *Church Advocate* of April 1830, Parker published a letter from his friend Richard Newport. In this exasperated letter, Newport rebuked eastern reformers, particularly those who published a pro-reform periodical entitled *Christian Examiner*. In this periodical, writers claimed that beginning with the year 1827, they were beginning to "restore to the world...the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" with an ultimate design to "*restore KING JESUS to his throne.*" Newport considered such language and beliefs a complete "farce." Reform societies could not restore God to his proper place for two reasons. First, Antimissionists believed that God and his reign through the true church had never been deposed, and therefore, needed no restoration. Second, they claimed that even if God

¹⁶⁷ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 27-28; Wetherington, *Plain Folk's Fight*, 54.

needed his power restored, the missions societies had no right to do it. Missions societies were usurping groups who had arisen at a “late hour” in time, and thus had no historical or biblical precedent for claiming any right to power. Every claim they made served only to challenge God’s authority and that of his true church.¹⁶⁸

Antimissionists feared that the missionaries’ challenges to God’s authority would lead to their challenging all kinds of authority. It seemed as if all of the reformers’ benevolent rhetoric served only to disguise their critical contempt for westerners and their underlying desire for power. Although the American Home Mission Society claimed “to be but the servant of the churches” and pretended “no ecclesiastical authority,” Antimissionists claimed precisely the opposite – that the societies exemplified the “disposition manifested in the east to govern the west.” Antimission Baptists never looked highly upon attempts to wrest power from God. When that attempt occurred in such a way that pitted Eastern, urban, market-driven, Arminian folks with nationally-focused goals over and against rural, locally-minded, Calvinist plainfolk of the West, they absolutely despised it.¹⁶⁹

Local Loyalties

Antimissionists reacted to missionaries with national interests so forcefully, because they treasured the local nature of their lives. From farming, to community activity, to government, everything occurred primarily on the local level for yeomen.

¹⁶⁸ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 7 (Apr. 1830): 152-55; vol. I, no. 9 (June 1830): 202-03.

¹⁶⁹ “First Anniversary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society,” proceedings of the convention (New York: A.B.H.M.S., 1832), 12; *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 1 (Oct. 1830): 15. Nathan Hatch discusses these issues in the writings of Antimissionists in *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 176-79.

Even those who married into more elite families or participated in the national market economy tended to remain closely connected to home. To be sure, they lived informed lives, aware of a much larger geographic spectrum than their town or county. Still, in their every-day practical lives, they gave their utmost attention to all things local.¹⁷⁰

Yeoman Antimissionists demonstrated their intense focus on local affairs through participation in both the local and national election processes. Local voters had always held control over offices and affairs on the county and state level, but during this era, they began to make their opinions known more widely. More so than ever before, plain folk of the Jacksonian era began participating in national political matters. Nominating conventions for national-level politics, once left to the elite, began to see the participation of common folk. National issues, although they rarely dealt directly with local issues, often had local implications. Because these plain folk considered the protection of their local affairs their top priority, they consequently gave their attention to national affairs as well. Their desire for all of these governments, according to Jackson's promises, was plain – the majority was to govern, and the government was to have “limited and specific, and not general, powers.” In other words, the common people supported authority outside and above their local governments, but only if kept to its own business and stayed out of theirs.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Mark Wetherington provides a clear example of yeomen retaining close ties to their local community, despite outside interests, in the Prologue of *Plain Folk's Fight*, his study of wiregrass Georgian yeomen in the antebellum period.

¹⁷¹ Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 312.

Historians have provided several explanations for why democratic thought regarding local government manifested itself so substantially during this period, particularly in the West. Richard Ellis writes:

It was the actual social and economic conditions under which many people lived...that sustained the perspective of localism and made it especially meaningful to a large number of Americans. This is because a very substantial portion of the people at this time were small farmers who lived in simple, isolated, and provincial communities. Since at best they had only a tangential connection with the market economy, it was in the interest of these people to want a weak, inactive, and frugal government which would...for the most part leave them alone.¹⁷²

Because most people in the West and South lived as farmers in sparsely-populated areas, they understandably preferred a national government which would encroach on their privacy as little as possible. Contributing to their desire to simply be left alone to govern their own affairs was their suspicion that centralized authority might run rampant in frontier farming communities. They did not necessarily disdain or discount national government so much as they pledged their allegiance with both eyes open.¹⁷³

Antimissionists' undergirded their beliefs and suspicions of secular national government with their principles of religious government. In the sphere of church politics, Antimissionists always held fast to the authority of local congregations, a tradition they claimed originated with the first-century writings of the Apostle Paul. This firm belief in the authority and influence of the local church over the local people, in turn, provided them with a reason for clinging to local authority in the political realm. In many established frontier communities, Wetherington writes, "Baptist congregations

¹⁷² Ellis, *The Union at Risk*, 3.

¹⁷³ Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*, 1-3, 107-08; Ellis, *The Union at Risk*, 3.

stood at the social center of their neighborhoods.” Such a position in communities gave churches opportunities to exercise authority and influence over the local people in all realms of life, even if those people were not officially members of the church. For the members of the church, however, the rules of governance were not so fluid.¹⁷⁴

Individual churches required that their members submit to the system of governance approved by their congregation or denomination. The Constitution of Daniel Parker’s church in southern Illinois clearly stated the foundational principle that every Baptist church member understood regarding church government and discipline: Article 6 - “each member should submit themselves to the church.” As we saw in the Wood River Church, this included everyone, even the pastor. These principles of church governance and submission to one’s own congregation had numerous implications for church members. First of all, it meant that churches should pay close attention to the spiritual gifts which her members exhibited. If leaders could properly assess and utilize the abilities of the congregation, they could then help the people produce as much spiritual fruit as possible. From the youngest child to the oldest adult, Parker encouraged his readers, “each saint...should know that there is something for them to do in the church of Christ.” However, church members could not simply exercise their gifts when and however they wanted. The church had the “duty to regulate the gifts which God [had] blessed her with, placing them in their proper places, that she [might] receive

¹⁷⁴ Wetherington, *Plain Folk’s Fight*, 36.

the full benefit of them.” By striking out alone, without the authority and guidance of one’s congregation, one would surely misuse, or abuse, his gifts.¹⁷⁵

Just as they oversaw spiritual gifts, churches also claimed the right to regulate and discipline the behavior of members. This proved especially successful in small communities on the frontier, because unlike in large cities, with large churches and populations, “there was no unnecessary delay between the act of offense and the trial of the offender.” If a person sinned in a frontier church with twenty members, which met in an area with only a handful of families, avoiding a speedy act of discipline would prove difficult. Whether the offense was gambling, drunkenness, adultery, or even providing funds to missionary organizations, Antimissionist Baptist churches governed with vigilance and regularity. A study of the records of any antebellum Baptist church would yield a wealth of examples of such discipline. At the Wood River Church in 1814, a dispute arose between Paul Beck and J. Beman over whether Beck had intentionally defrauded Beman by selling him “an unsound mare.” The church began the investigation by asking Beck to appear before the church at its monthly meeting. Here, the church would allow him to make his defense. When he did not show up to either the July or August meeting and subsequently refused to talk to any church members, the congregation had only one choice: “he not being Present nor no encouragement that he would come to meeting he is therefore excluded for neglecting to hear the Church.” Not until August, 1815, an entire year later, did the church receive

¹⁷⁵ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 11 (Aug. 1830): 243-47; Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 38; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 6 (Mar. 1830): 139-40.

Beck back into fellowship, and that only by his “recantation & acknowledgment” of the church’s authority over him.¹⁷⁶

Considering the close watch they kept on their own congregations, Antimissionists found it absurd that any national group would even attempt to watch over and discipline local Christians. Thus, when missionaries claimed to have tens or hundreds of thousands of Baptist followers under their care, John Taylor mocked their “ignorance of Baptist government.” By bypassing local church governments and appealing directly to individual members of congregations, they undermined a fundamental Baptist ecclesiological principle. No one with a proper understanding of Baptist government would ever assume that a national Baptist body, itself illegitimate, would have any right to appeal to or govern local Baptists. Furthermore, even if national missions societies could claim authority, their claim that individual Baptists throughout the nation supported missions was misleading, because those individuals had no such right in many Baptist churches. In the end, regardless of their claims, no missionary could boast any sort of national following in the Baptist Church, because all the people who supposedly followed them were subject primarily to their respective local churches.¹⁷⁷

The only form of government outside of the local congregation which Antimission Baptists accepted was what they called an “association.” Parker explained it in this way:

¹⁷⁶ Records of the Wood River Church, in Sweet, *The Baptists*, 263-66.

¹⁷⁷ Walter Posey provides an excellent discussion of Baptist church discipline in Chapter 3 of *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1776-1845* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957); Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 25; Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement,” 510.

Thus we believe, that the same spirit that taught the utility and benefit of the combination of members in a Church capacity, for the benefit of each other, and the glory of God, teaches the same utility and benefit of a combination of the different incorporated particles of the gospel Church, for the same purposes, in something like an associated capacity.¹⁷⁸

Partially due to competition with the highly organized administration of the Methodist Church on the frontier, many Baptist churches chose to cautiously pursue their own form of communication. Rather than establishing a church hierarchy, they created associations. These associations consisted of churches in the same geographical area voluntarily meeting together to discuss issues. For example, Parker's church in Illinois counted itself as one of the handful of churches belonging to the Wabash Association in southern Illinois. Because churches guarded their independence so closely, these associations always served specific and limited powers which their creators, the individual churches, delineated for them. They had absolutely no governing ability over any member of any church involved. In many ways, these associations mirrored American federalism under the Articles of Confederation. Just as each state governed all of its own affairs, so individual churches ruled themselves. Just as the national government under the Articles lacked the power to tax, raise armies, or force the states to do much of anything, so the church association lacked the authority to force individual churches to comply with its will. When many of the churches of the Wabash Association began to lobby for the support missions in the late 1820s, Parker sarcastically defied them: "Is the Association the head, ruler and law giver of the Churches? Or is she a creature of the Churches, for their own benefit, and therefore not

¹⁷⁸ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 33.

bound by the illegal acts of the Association?” His church barred associations from even overseeing “arguments and investigations of subjects,” because such an act would constitute a “violation of the principles of [their] union.” The associations could use their ears to listen to subjects of complaint, but they might as well not use their mouths to respond.¹⁷⁹

Still, even the staunchest defenders of individual church authority believed in the utility and benefit of associations. Individual churches infused worth into their respective association by utilizing it as “a medium of correspondence with each other.” This correspondence, although not authoritative, would strengthen the bonds between them. When controversies arose, such as the one over missions, churches could meet together to exchange opinions and make informed decisions. For association meetings, churches would generally send representatives from their congregations to a previously agreed upon place, perhaps once a year. They carefully referred to these representatives as “messengers” rather than as officials of any kind, for their sole purpose was to meet, enjoy fellowship, exchange news, and discuss issues. Ceding any authority to outsiders, even other Baptists, remained out of the question.¹⁸⁰

Although defining the inner workings of Baptist *congregations* and *associations* may seem tedious, the Antimission Baptists considered a proper understanding of them as crucial in their fight against missionary *societies* and *incorporations*. Without

¹⁷⁹ Posey, *The Baptist Church*, 155-57; *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 2 (Nov. 1829): 34; Daniel Parker, *The Authors' Defence, by Explanations and Matters of Fact. Remarks on Discipline, and Reflections on the Church Christ with the Utility and Benefits of Associations* (E. Stout, 1824), 23; *A Second Dose*, 50, 63.

¹⁸⁰ Sweet, *The Baptists*, 55.

comprehending the complexity of Baptists' arguments against these missionary enterprises, one might incorrectly assume that despite their lofty language supporting local rights and authority, western Antimissionists were simply motivated by sectional prejudices – in short, that Westerners simply hated Yankees. This was not the case. The fight over missions often divided along sectional lines, but it was primarily a response to the missionary societies' rejection of the ecclesiology of the local and independent Baptist Church.

Missionary Societies: "A Mongrel Breed"

Missionary societies, along with most of their reforming counterparts, truly believed in the benevolent nature of their service and work. As a result, they rarely limited themselves geographically. By their very nature, they sought to expand their horizons out from their local headquarters and into the world. Missionaries who emanated from these groups generally received a stipend from their sponsoring organization. However, because this money rarely provided them with everything they needed for life on the mission field, missionaries such as John Mason Peck and Isaac McCoy asked for donations, sold pamphlets, and participated in various other economic enterprises in order to supply themselves.¹⁸¹

Antimission Baptists didn't buy it for a second. To them, these societies represented elitist interests, merely masquerading as benevolent institutions. They perpetually repudiated Baptist faith and government in order to gain power, a few

¹⁸¹ Parker, *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 11 (Aug. 1830): 249.

dollars, or both. Their entire structure repudiated Baptist doctrine, taking their money and orders from national conventions and societies without the consent of the local church. In 1836, the antimission Buttahatchee Association of Mississippi opposed the Baptist state convention, because they feared that that it would exercise power in an “arbitrary and oppressive” manner. National religious conventions, in their minds, could only prove worse. The opportunity for distant eastern organizations to elect officers and appoint field workers to the West smacked too much of an elitist plot to suppress true democracy.¹⁸²

Antimissionists especially feared the political wrangling of the missions societies, because the societies had rejected God’s Law for the government of the church and had replaced it with their own. To begin with, rather than participating in missions as one “member of the body” of a local church, they had created an entirely separate body. For this sin, Parker spared no judgment:

And this is what constitutes the whore of Rome, the mother of harlots and her daughters, the body of anti-Christ, and the reason why they are anti-christians, because they have refused to submit to the authority of Christ in his church, and have set themselves up in separate bodies, claiming the name, word, and authority which Christ has give to his church, the married wife.¹⁸³

Antimissionists equated missions societies separation from the local church with an unfaithful wife filing for divorce. Furthermore, missionaries employed by these societies put themselves in a position which made them answerable ultimately to their employer rather than to God and His designated authority on Earth: the local church.

¹⁸² Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 73.

¹⁸³ Parker, *Views on the Two Seeds*, 36.

Instead of depending on God to provide them with sustenance for their journeys, they depended upon the missions boards to supply them. And when societies desired to change tactics or emissaries, they simply altered their practices and reassigned their missionaries by whimsical “political jiggling,” with no thought to what the Bible had to say.¹⁸⁴

Missionary societies considered their enterprises prime examples of a republican religious government on a large scale. After all, they took the idea of church membership and participation to thousands of people throughout the United States, many of whom had not previously engaged in ecclesiastical activity. By bringing together people from various states, and even various denominations, missionaries believed that they actually represented a widespread constituency. John Taylor, on the other hand, believed that their act of virtual representation was anything but republican in its scheme. “These great men,” he claimed, “are verging close to an aristocracy, with an object to sap the foundation of Baptist republican government.” Rather than working for themselves on their own land, missionaries assumed “a free hold all over the United States” and found it reasonable “to ask their vassals for money” wherever they found them, all the while considering themselves more worthy of “the name of preachers” than the local Baptist ministers. Regardless of missionaries’ declarations of respect for local rights and beliefs, Antimissionists accordantly labeled them as usurping aristocrats.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Parker, *The Authors’ Defence*, 21; Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 16, 22; *A Public Address to the Baptist Society and Friends of Religion in General on the Principle and Practice of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions or the United States of America* (Stout & Osborn, 1820), 17-18.

¹⁸⁵ Taylor, *Thoughts on Missions*, 10, 25, 12.

When political and religious institutions combined for any reason, Antimissionists claimed that they each violated their respective authoritative documents, the Bible and the Constitution. Republican institutions, according to the principles of the Constitution, should never bind themselves to a particular religion. It would prove even more heinous for Christianity to limit God's rule by melding it with a finite, secular government. Antimissionists believed the missions societies were doing just that, and they judged it as sinfully joining together "the spirit of God" and the "spirit of the world." Parker believed that Constantine had initiated this sinful meld fifteen centuries earlier when he "established religion by law" and thereby, poured "poison...into the church." The missionary societies had simply continued the trend by pursuing "a course to mix or amalgamate the world and church together in the christian name or character." His claims were not unfounded.¹⁸⁶

On February 9, 1824, members of the Board of Trustees for Columbian College petitioned the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States to supply them with a loan in the amount of \$50,000. The problem with this request was that it came from a college which had been incorporated by none other than the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions. One of the three trustees who signed the petition to Congress was Luther Rice. Having gone into debt by at least \$45,000, the board desperately needed money to ensure the continuance of the college and its education of future ministers and missionaries. In order to accomplish this task, they concluded that they must ask for

¹⁸⁶ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 4 (Jan. 1831): 79, 85.

money from outside of the church altogether. In doing so, they removed the authority of the Holy Spirit in the biblical church and bound themselves to the spirit of the world.¹⁸⁷

Parker and the Antimissionists firmly believed that God commanded Christians to live under the pure care and direction of the Baptist Church “without the smallest particle of a Babelonish garment, or lisp of the Ashdod language.” Integrating with foreign influences had no place in their religion, even if those foreign influences came from other Baptists. By rejecting the government set forth for the church and choosing to blend with the world, the missionary societies had scorned their right to be called part of the true Church. In mixing with the ways of the world, they had become “a mongrel breed” of Christians. While claiming to desire the union of the Baptist Church, they had in effect, seceded from the union.¹⁸⁸

Concluding Thoughts

During his presidency, Andrew Jackson exhibited a complex understanding of the proper roles of local and national governments. Although many charged him with clinging completely to local and states’ rights in every controversy, his actions evidenced otherwise. Jackson and his most perceptive supporters never opposed all things national, nor did they uncritically favor all things local. Rather, they considered the proper sphere of each and responded accordingly. In a very similar manner, Daniel Parker and the people involved in the Antimission Movement did not put all their eggs in either the national or local basket. They did not pledge uninhibited allegiance to local

¹⁸⁷ Parker records details of this incident in both *The Authors Defence*, 13-16, and in the *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 1 (Oct. 1830): 12.

¹⁸⁸ *Church Advocate*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1829), 19; vol. I, no. 11 (Aug. 1830), 249.

authorities, whether secular or religious. Neither did they altogether reject national authorities or broader ecclesiastical alliances. Instead, they considered what each authority in their lives demanded, evaluated which deserved precedence in each particular situation, and acted accordingly. In doing so, they exhibited the true federalism which the country as a whole had begun to abandon.¹⁸⁹

By invading the secular and sacred political space of frontier Antimissionists, the missions societies had invaded every aspect of their lives. In every kind of political dealing, the missionaries refused to comport with “the genuine republican spirit or principle.” Even worse, they challenged God’s authority by trampling upon the laws he had ordained for church governance. According to Antimissionists, rejecting God’s authority and God’s method of church government was tantamount to rejecting God. In defense of God and the true church, they felt they had no choice but to oppose the missions societies.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Ellis, *The Union at Risk*, 19-25.

¹⁹⁰ *Church Advocate*, vol. I, no. 3 (Dec. 1829): 67-68.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

On April 27, 1832, the members of the American Baptist Home Mission Society convened in New York City for their inaugural meeting. Their plan of operations explicitly stated their purpose – to preach the gospel to everyone in the West. For them, the situation in the West was dire. The whole range of the “Great Valley of the Mississippi, presents a population...lamentably destitute of the frequent and faithful preaching of [the] Gospel,” they claimed. Most of the “four millions of immortal spirits” who lived there had heard, at best, “some distorted heresy or cunningly devised fable.” The missionaries aimed to bring the true Gospel to the West.¹⁹¹

Such a proclamation of a religious famine in the West would have come as a surprise to all the Christians who lived there. Peter Cartwright, an itinerant Methodist minister in Illinois resented the “fresh, green...missionaries” of the Home Mission Society and their “wailings and lamentations.” He saw no such lack of Christian preachers in the West. Much to the contrary, he alone knew “hundreds of traveling and local preachers” who had ministered faithfully for years. Likewise, Daniel Parker and the tens of thousands of westerners who joined the Antimission Movement scoffed at the missions societies’ proclamations. They knew that they had spiritual leaders, because

¹⁹¹ “First Anniversary of the American Baptist Home Mission Society,” proceedings of the convention (New York: A.B.H.M.S., 1832), 6, 13-14.

they heard them preach at their local church every Sunday. Antimissionists may have been “lamentably destitute” of many things, but religion was not one of them.¹⁹²

By 1832, missions societies could have spoken of the lack of religion in the West and South only if they ignored a troubling reality: churches and associations throughout the nation had continued warring over the issue of missions. In Indiana, the conflict hit hard, and quickly. In 1829, the Silver Creek Church of Indiana had split into two parts due to the missions conflict, the first church in the state to do so. By 1832, every single association in the state had chosen sides in the battle. The controversy had made “almost a complete sweep” of the Baptist churches and associations in Tennessee. In Illinois, missionary Jacob Bower endured taunting and disturbances during his sermons all the time. One day, a man in Greene County invited him to preach at his home. A crowd had gathered to hear Bower preach, but when the owner of the house discovered that Bower was a missionary, he refused to allow Bower to preach and dispersed the crowd. Far from experiencing drought, the West and South were clearly overflowing with religion – just not the kind that the missions societies preferred.¹⁹³

In many areas of the country, Antimissionists continued to experience a substantial measure of success. In Illinois, missionary Warren Nichols complained in October 1835 that the members of the Baptist church in his neighborhood were so prejudiced against missions societies that would not even “hear a Baptist preachers if he be sent out by the missionary Society.” In Georgia, only one association in the whole

¹⁹² Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, introduction by Charles L. Wallis (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 236, 244;

¹⁹³ William Warren Sweet, ed., *Religion on the American Frontier: The Baptists, 1783-1830*, introduction by Shirley Jackson Case (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 62-64.

state attended the 1835 state Baptist convention. By 1837, only three out of twenty-one associations in Alabama fully supported missions; the other eighteen either completely opposed missions or remained divided on the issue.¹⁹⁴

At the same time, however, the leaders of the Antimission Movement in the West continued to drift apart in belief in practice. Alexander Campbell had left the Baptist Church to form a new sect. John Taylor, in his old age, had begun to question the fierce antimissionist writings of his earlier days. Daniel Parker, weary of controversy in Illinois and Indiana, began contemplating yet another move for his family. Along with his brother James, Parker made a prospective visit to Texas in October 1832. On March 16, 1833, they both took the oath of allegiance to the Mexican government and thus solidified their plans to move. Because the Mexican government only allowed the Catholic Church to plant new congregations in Texas, Parker exploited a loophole in the system. After returning to Illinois in the late spring of 1833, Parker and his congregation formed the Pilgrim Predestinarian Regular Baptist Church. In August 1833, these pilgrims and their Illinois-based congregation left for Texas, where they became the first Baptist church to ever reside in the state.¹⁹⁵

With its most vocal leaders dispersing, the Antimission Movement began to splinter. In the nearby state of Tennessee, the strength of the Antimission Movement

¹⁹⁴ William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1850: Vol. III: The Congregationalists* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), 166, fn11; Byron Cecil Lambert, *The Rise of the Anti-Mission Baptists: Sources and Leaders, 1800-1840* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 391; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 32.

¹⁹⁵ Dan B. Wimberly, *Frontier Religion: Elder Daniel Parker, His Religious and Political Life* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), 91-95.

had already begun to wane. In the mid-1820s, the Antimissionists had overwhelmed the state so completely that no one had dared to support the missions societies. One Baptist church in Nashville had lost almost of all its members due to the controversy. Yet by 1835, that same church could not only claim more members than ever before, but had raised over \$250 for missions. The Antimissionists experienced an even greater loss when on April 12, 1835, at the age of 83, John Taylor died in his Kentucky home. The people of the Antimission Movement in the West had lost one of their greatest champions. For the next decade, most states throughout the West and South would continue to decline in numbers and influence.¹⁹⁶

As long as Daniel Parker lived, however, Antimissionism was not dead. By September 1843, Parker and his family had lived in Texas for a decade. Although he had distanced himself from the tumultuous religious conflicts of Illinois and Indiana, he had remained a busy man. Between 1835 and 1836, Parker had befriended Sam Houston, received authorization to build a fort for himself and some of his fellow pilgrims, and signed the Texas Declaration of Independence from Mexico. In 1839, the people of Shelby County elected him as a representative to the Texas House of Representatives. However, within a few weeks of his election, Parker was forced to give up his seat in the House, because the Texas Constitution strictly forbade any minister from holding political office.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Lambert, *The Rise*, 392, fn 4; Walter B. Posey, *The Baptist Church in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1776-1845* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 77; Chester Raymond Young, an introduction to *A History of Ten Baptist Churches of Which the Author Has Been Alternately a Member*, 1823. 3rd ed., Baptists on the American Frontier (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995), 76.

¹⁹⁷ Lambert, *The Rise*, 283; Wimberly, *Frontier Religion*, 110-12.

Although Parker could not participate officially in politics, he continued to devote himself to religion, especially toward supporting the Two Seeds doctrine and opposing the missions societies. Throughout the late-1830s and early-1840s, Parker regularly wrote articles pertaining to both. From Texas, he participated in a debate over the Two Seeds in *The Signs of the Times*, an antimissionist periodical based in New York City. He established his influence in Texas as widely as he had done in Illinois and Indiana. In the ten years he had lived there, Parker had almost single-handedly formed the Union Association of Regular Predestinarian Baptists, an association of eight antimissionist churches whose memberships totaled about 200.¹⁹⁸ On October 21, 1843, the *Red-Lander*, a southeast Texas newspaper, published a letter which Parker had sent them. In the letter, the aged Parker made it clear that as long as he lived, the battle over missions societies was not over:

We in the far west...stand unyieldingly opposed to the missionary or effort operations of the day in all their various forms and ways...[My] labors and efforts have been hard and severe, both from the pulpit and the press, against the missionary operations of the day, firmly believing that the spirit and principle of which is the abounding iniquity to the distress of Zion...Hence every society uniting, forming, or combining together professedly for religious purposes...except 'the church of the living God...' are anti to the church of God, and to be guarded and warred against.¹⁹⁹

As long as missions societies "anti to the church of God" continued to live, Parker would draw the sword and fight them.

One year later, on December 3, 1844, Parker died in his bed, his family and friends surrounding him until the end. Levi Roberts, a man who knew Parker during his

¹⁹⁸ Lambert, *The Rise*, 283; Wimberly, *Frontier Religion*, 139-40.

¹⁹⁹ Daniel Parker, letter to the editor, *The Red-Lander*, vol. 4, no. 17, October 21, 1843.

Texas years, wrote a critique of him in 1847: “We always considered him a good man, possessing a warm heart, a clear head and giant intellect, but surely badly cultivated, judging from the effect produced on society by his education.” Antimissionist yeomen like Parker valued honesty, common sense, and hard work, not the elite privilege of formal education. If Parker had heard Roberts’s comment, he would have wholeheartedly agreed.²⁰⁰

The Southern Baptist Convention and its Aftermath

From May 8-12, 1845, 377 delegates from Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Kentucky, and the District of Columbia met in Augusta, Georgia, in order to form the Southern Baptist Convention. After years of debates, Baptists from these states had decided that northern Baptists no longer represented their interests in any area of life. The question of reform societies, including missions societies, was one of the most crucial points of contention between the two groups. Southerners voiced two primary objections to the reform societies based in the Northeast. First, many resented the societies for always choosing northerners as their representatives. Even when southerners requested aid from reform societies and recommended some of their own people for the job, the societies often bypassed them in favor of northern representatives. Second, groups like the Antimissionists continued to reject the work of the societies as a matter of principle. In 1846, at least 68,000 such people claimed membership in antimissionist Baptist churches. The vast majority of

²⁰⁰ Quoted in Lambert, *The Rise*, 255, fn4.

these people resided in states which joined the Southern Baptist Convention.

Considering that this number includes only *members* of Baptist churches, not taking into account non-members or members of other denominations, it is safe to say that Antimissionism had a significant impact on its formation, and thus, on the further division of the nation.²⁰¹

By this time, however, Antimissionism had already reached its peak. With their two greatest leaders dead and missions societies progressively gaining strength throughout the backcountry, Antimissionists could not maintain their defenses. In addition, a question more vital to the life and unity of the nation had continued rising while the battle over missions had been declining: the slavery question. The Southern Baptist Convention of 1845 reflected this trend, pitting southern Baptists in favor of slavery against northern Baptists opposed to it. While the missions controversy threatened to split individual churches and associations, the slavery question threatened to destroy the entire nation. Understandably, the Antimission Movement slowly, but surely, faded out.

Final Assessments

The Antimission Movement provides us with a complex story of yeomen lives in the antebellum South and West. Although that story contained geographic, economic, political, and social elements, we can begin to interpret its participants only by understanding their religion. And it is crucial to understand *their* religion, not just

²⁰¹ Posey, *The Baptist Church*, 153-54; Sweet, *The Baptists*, 66. For an excellent survey of the work of all types of reform societies in the South and West, see John W. Kuykendall, *Southern Enterprise: The Work of National Evangelical Societies in the Antebellum South* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982).

religion in general. Bertram Wyatt-Brown considered religion in his study of the western Antimissionists, but he assessed them negatively, claiming that their opposition was foolish, a reaction of “crabbed and backward character.” While northern religious people and societies “threw open American doors to European and English heterodoxy,” Antimissionists stubbornly kept their doors closed. The problem with such an assessment, even one that considers religion, is that it totally misses the point. Antimissionists never desired European heterodoxy. They preferred the plain, clear interpretation of Scripture to theologizing. On questions of theology and ecclesiastical practice, they remained stalwart in Baptist tradition, even when the revival culture of the nation pressed in upon them. They never sought the religious opinions of the elite or appealed to the intelligentsia for theological advice. Instead, they sought local preachers, often without education, who could speak to them on their own level. Comparing the successes of the missionists and Antimissionists in regard to their openness to religious pluralism, therefore, misses the point. Failing to consider their professed religious beliefs as central misses the question altogether.²⁰²

In truth, Daniel Parker, John Taylor, and the tens of thousands in the Antimission Movement were never truly anti-missions. They opposed the theology of missionaries which exalted the place of human choice over God’s sovereignty in salvation, not theology in general. Because they believed labor, money, and markets belonged primarily to individuals and local communities, they opposed the invasive, national,

²⁰² Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Antimission Movement in the Jacksonian South: A Study in Regional Folk Culture,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 36 (Nov. 1970), 525.

market-driven economic ideas of missions societies. While his opponents incessantly claimed that he and his followers opposed benevolent institutions, Parker often claimed just the opposite – that he was an “advocate for the *mission*” and believed that the “church is and should be, a benevolent institution.” The catch – all benevolent institutions, whether “the education of the heathen, and translating the scriptures, or any other point of christian duty in support of the gospel,” should be “formed by, and under the direction and government of the Baptist church or union. Without support from the local church or precedent in the Bible, every generous act turned to poison. With local church support and biblical precedent, all benevolent acts, including missions, turned to gold. With this more complex understanding of the beliefs and motives of the Antimissionists, it becomes clear that the term “Antimission Movement” is in fact, a misnomer.²⁰³

²⁰³ *Church Advocate*, vol. II, no. 2 (Nov. 1830): 36-40; vol. II, no. 1 (Oct. 1830): 10; *The Author's Defence*, 6-7.

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VITA

Name: Brian Russell Franklin

Address: The Department of History, Melbern G. Glasscock Building,
Room 101, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-
4236

Email Address: brianfranklin@tamu.edu

Education: B.A., History, Dallas Baptist University, 2004
M.A., History, Texas A&M University, 2007